

# *It's Only Rock 'n' Roll But I like It . . .*

A history of the early days of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane . . .

as told by some of the people who were there.



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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to  
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## Abstract

The music history that is generally presented to students in Queensland secondary schools as **the** history of music is underpinned by traditions associated with the social and cultural elite of colonialist Europe. On the other hand, contemporary popular music is the style with which most in this community identify and its mass consumption by teenagers in Brisbane was heralded with the arrival of rock 'n' roll in the mid-1950s.

This project proposes that the involvement of the music education system in, and the application of digital technology to, the collection and storage of musical memories and memorabilia with historical potential is an important first step on the journey to a music history that is built on the democratic principles of twenty-first century, culturally and socially diverse Australia rather than on the autocratic principles of colonialist Europe. In taking a first step, this project focused on collecting memories and memorabilia from people who were involved in an aspect of the coming of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane. Memories were collected in the form of recorded conversations and these recordings, along with other audio and visual material were transferred to digital format for distribution.

As an oral history focusing its attention on those who were involved with the coming of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane in the mid to late 1950s and the early 1960s, this project is intended as a starting point for that journey. Even as a starting point however, some interesting findings emerged. For example:

- Early Brisbane rock ‘n’ roll was a suburban affair.
- Dancers were just as important in bringing rock ‘n’ roll to Brisbane as were the musicians.
- Musicians not only had to learn new music on new instruments, they had to, in many cases, make their own instruments.
- The rock ‘n’ roll story as promoted by the newspapers of the day was very different to how it is remembered by the participants.
- Community institutions such as family, school and church played a vital support role in the lives of young rock ‘n’ roll musicians.
- Brisbane’s rock ‘n’ roll musicians generally reflected the conservative nature of their community.
- Brisbane’s very early rock ‘n’ roll musicians were strongly influenced by country and western music.
- Once the commercial viability of rock ‘n’ roll became evident, it became more accepted as an entertainment format.

Of the many thousands of people who lived in Brisbane during the 1950s and who had an interest in or were affected by the coming of rock ‘n’ roll, only a very small percentage were involved in this project. This would indicate that there is a significant body of untold memories and stories waiting to respond to the interest of Queensland music students.

## **Keywords**

Rock ‘n’ roll, music history, Brisbane music history, oral history, music education, rock ‘n’ roll history

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Geoffrey Walden

January 2003

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who in some way have made the completion of this thesis possible. Most important are those people who lived and worked in Brisbane during the early days of rock 'n' roll and who enthusiastically made their memories available. This project belongs to them. In thanking the city's rockers as participants in this project, it is important to remember John Bell who passed away during the period of the research. He was influential in getting the project started and keeping it on track. This project, as well as the Brisbane rock 'n' roll scene would have been that much poorer without his influence over the past forty years.

Dr Gordon Tait has been my supervisor for the majority of time I spent on this thesis and it is to him that I owe a debt of gratitude for his time, support and encouragement. Many is the time he had to redirect my thought processes to ensure that I didn't succumb to my "usual urge to not-so-subtly hint that the entire process is a crock of shit" (Tait, 2002). Thanks Gordon, it has been a pleasure to work with you. My sincere thanks also must go to Dr Belinda Carpenter for her time, support and editorial comment. Her valued input has been essential in getting my words into a readable form.

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## Preface

### Using the CDs

The multimedia section of this project is contained on three CD-ROMs that will run in Windows based machines only.

Disks 2 and 3 contain the conversations recorded with the participants as well as the transcriptions of those conversations. On Disk 2 can be found the conversations of people with a surname beginning with the letters A to J while the remainder of the conversations are available on Disk 3. Disk 1 contains data directly related to the printed section of the project.

### Accessing the CDs

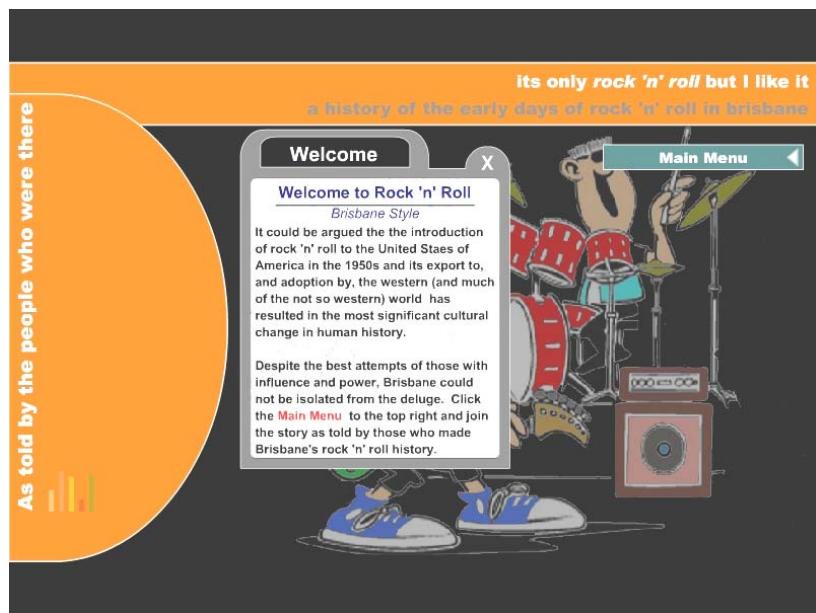
1. Insert the CD into the CD-ROM drive of a Windows based computer. If your computer is set to '*autorun*' CD-ROMs, the CD will start automatically. If it is not and the CD does not start, follow steps 2 – 3 below.
2. From the Windows Start menu, click on **Start**. Click on **RUN** and then browse to your CD-ROM drive (typically drive d:).
3. The file needed to start each CD is listed in a table below. Double click on the file applicable to the CD you have in your CD-ROM drive. This will take you back to your **OK** window. Click **OK** to start the program.

Disk	Start File Name
------	-----------------

Disk 1	aaentry.exe
Disk 2	conversation_1.exe
Disk 3	conversation_2.exe

### Disk 1 Main Menu

The first screen of Disk 1 will look as below. The music playing in the background for this screen is a song called *Billy's Blues* and was recorded by the Dominos at the 4BH studios in 1959. If you can't hear the sound, check the Volume control in the bottom right hand corner of the screen. When you are ready to proceed, click on the **Main Menu** button. All sections of the project are available from resultant menu. When you have finished, click on **Quit** from this menu and your screen will be returned to its previous glory.



**Illustration 1:** First screen from Disk 1.

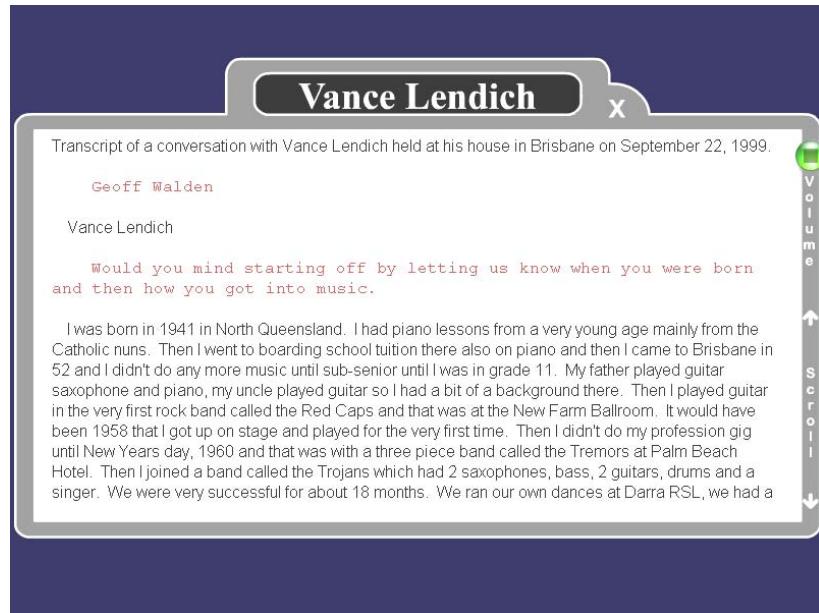
## Disk 2 and 3 Main Menu

The first screen of Disks 2 and 3 will look as below. To hear a recorded conversation, click on the appropriate *bubble* and then the appropriate name.



**Illustration 2:** First screen from Disks 2 and 3.

Because the audio files are rather large, it may take a few seconds for the screen to change to something like below and for the sound to start. The volume of the conversation may be controlled by the green button near the top right hand corner of the screen. It is set to full volume at the start of each conversation and should be dragged down to lower the volume. The up and down arrows below the volume control allow for scrolling through the transcript.



**Illustration 3:** Working screen from Disks 2 and 3.

## Introduction

Education Queensland recognises and values diversity. As far back as 1994, the then Director-General of Education, Mr Frank Peach, stated in an article headed Social Justice and Excellence that:

*Because of the diversity of our students and the values held by them and their parents, our schools must ensure that curriculum and management practices are sensitive to the range of circumstances, learning styles and individual needs, and build on the experiences of students. (Peach, 1994)*

More current and included in the Department of Education Manual on Education Queensland's website is a policy statement which reads:

*Education Queensland recognizes and values the cultural and language diversity of every school and community. It has a role and responsibility to contribute to a socially just society by promoting equitable and fair access to, participation in, and outcomes from, the education provided for students who make up these diverse groups.*

*This policy focuses on addressing inequalities through the reshaping of the curriculum in responding to the educational needs of culturally and linguistically diverse groups and deciding on cultural learning for all students. (DOEM, 2002)*

Music education made its way into the Queensland secondary curriculum in the 1970s and is thus a relatively new addition. This state was the last in Australia to include music as a subject in the secondary school curriculum (Bridges, 1970, p. 92) but one of the first to introduce an extensive instrumental music program. According to Stowasser (1983), the system that was introduced into Queensland was based on a British model of music education. This has

meant that students are offered two pathways to formal music training, through the Instrumental Music Program (IMP) and through the Classroom Music Program (CMP). The IMP is staffed by itinerant teachers or instructors who visit a cluster of schools on a weekly rotation and their job is to provide small group tuition on orchestral instruments during school hours and to organise and direct extra-curricular ensembles, be they orchestra, concert band or stage band. The IMP is generally not a subject that can be used by a year 12 student in the calculation of her/his OP (Overall Position) score for university entrance. The CMP on the other hand is treated as a traditional school subject and is taught by school based music teachers as part of the general school timetable. It can be included in the calculation of a student's OP score.

Music plays an important social and cultural role in the lives of young people and the community in general (Willis, 1990, p. 59) so it is not surprising to find that both the IMP and the CMP are highly valued by school Principals and parents. This is evidenced by the great effort exerted by school communities to gain and maintain the services of classroom and instrumental music teachers. Students appear to value what is offered in the music curriculum somewhat less though. Recent research (Walden, 1996) indicates that for the CMP, the year 12 Board Course in music at Queensland schools is one of the least selected subjects, attracting an average of 7.7 students per class offered. Things are not much better for the IMP since, in spite of offering free tuition, it attracts less than 10% of the secondary school student population.

Given these numbers and the significant allocation of public resources provided for music education, one should wonder why so few school students are taking advantage of music education as offered in Queensland schools. It is proposed that at least part of the answer to that question can be found in what has become the common sense, universal and sacred understandings associated with the word ‘music’ in the education arena. To most music teachers and their school music programs, the central focus of the music education system (of which they are a product), is not the music most closely related to the their students’ knowledge, experiences or perspectives but the form of music that was “originally written by Europeans for consumption by the upper classes dating back from roughly the medieval era to the first decades of the twentieth century” (Wicks, 1998, p. 56). So deeply has this “Classical” music, that is Western European Art Music (WEAM), become entrenched in the education system of this state that cultural bias has become invisible and “we are rarely even aware of the throttling hold it has on our … musical conscience” (Wicks, 1998, p. 55).

It would seem reasonable then that an education system that values cultural diversity should champion a challenge to this entrenchment and attempt to render evident the monocultural perspective (Wicks, 1998, p. 55) of its music education system. To do so, the following questions, among many, could be asked:

- Why is it that a student wishing to learn to play an instrument traditionally associated with “classical” music may have her/his cultural choices rewarded by the school system at public expense while a student wishing to learn to play an instrument associated with contemporary popular music may not?
- Why don’t we refer to the CMP as the “classroom Western European art music program”?
- Why do we offer in the IMP only instruments with which few in the general community identify and which few students will ever play after they finish school?
- Why do we legitimate through school performances musical styles with which a minority in the community identify?
- Why do we offer a CMP which concentrates on musical styles that are unrepresentative of the social and cultural background of most of our students and their families and which focuses on musical languages and traditions foreign to the music with which most of them identify?

It is relatively unlikely however, that such a challenge will be championed from within Education Queensland despite its need to operate in an increasingly diverse society. Music educators in this state are increasingly the product of music examination systems such as the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) (Walden, 1996). As pointed out by Bridges (1970, p. 128), the AMEB, with a curriculum based on the WEAM canon, has had a controlling influence over music education in Australia for much of the past century and has changed little during that time with conservatism being one of its main restraining forces.

Music students, including prospective music teachers, have been encouraged and expected to demonstrate their progressive level of technical and musical skill by passing through graded examinations and gaining their 'letters' as offered by one or more of the examination boards. For instance, a year 12 student who gained an *A. Mus. A.* as conferred by the AMEB would be almost guaranteed a place of study at a Queensland university music department or conservatorium.

According to Bourdieu (1976, p. 114),

*(t)eachers are the products of a system whose aim is to transmit an aristocratic culture, and are likely to adopt its values with greater ardour in proportion to the degree to which they owe it their own academic and social success.*

As a product of colonialist European culture, WEAM is based on traditions associated with the expansion and imposition of that culture around the world during the past two hundred years. An orchestra or concert band for instance can only function musically because of its autocratic structure. While democratic mores have found their way into many other facets of Queensland education in recent times, WEAM

*... must now be considered one last bastion of Western colonialism in this hemisphere, a stronghold of the principles of class hierarchy that represents in the public mind the unqualified preeminence of elite Western values in a singularly – even stunningly – diverse society (Wicks, 1998, p. 56).*

Important in maintaining the unchallenged stature of WEAM in the education system has been the parallel development in Europe of history as a profession. Those with suitable wealth and power had access to the history

profession to have their view of the music experience recorded for posterity in notated form. WEAM has depended for its very existence on this association. According to Thompson (1998, p. 21), “all history depends upon its social purpose. This is why ... children are taught history in schools”. A social purpose of the history of WEAM has been to cement its position of prestige in the education system as unique and unchallengeable and thereby promote its cultural meanings by rewarding those who choose to adopt them.

An examination of the official secondary and tertiary curricular offerings in music education facilities in Queensland indicates that WEAM history has carried out its social purpose to perfection. Challenging that success is not to denigrate the fact that those associated with the composition, performance, documentation and scholarship of WEAM have made a significant contribution to social, cultural and economic life as it is presently experienced in the Western world. However, music history in the twenty-first century should have a different social purpose to that which has been inherited from the colonial past – it should be presented in educational institutions as representative of the democracy as defined by the social and cultural diversity of the nation.

Changing that purpose will present some challenges to interested music educators. While it may be reasonable to suggest that one challenge might involve teachers presenting the history of WEAM from a critical perspective in view of its elite and autocratic lineage, a much more important challenge involves the point that WEAM history does not include the musical experiences of the

poor, of the disenfranchised or of the working class. The history of those groups has not made it to the official history books and never will, given the finite nature of human life. While there is little that Queensland music educators can do about that situation, there is much that can be done to ensure that future generations have access to a music history that is representative of as many facets of the community as possible, a history that is defined by the democratic traditions of twenty-first century Australia rather than those of colonialist Europe. Involving students and teachers in the collection of music history will be a useful first step in creating a new social purpose for music history.

### **The project**

In the introduction to his thesis *The Pop Music Scene in Australia in the 1960s*, Zion (1988, p. 2) suggests that there are three main problems associated with “investigating the history of pop music in Australia …”. The first is that “pop music” has only recently gained any legitimacy as a field of “academic enquiry”. The second follows on in that because of the short time span, there is little consensus as to how that research should be carried out. The third has to do with the overseas research into the field of early rock ‘n’ roll and the extent to which it can be applied to the Australian situation.

In the decade and a half since his thesis was presented, little has changed, especially in relation to the Queensland situation. As few institutions boast staff with research interests or expertise in the area, it could be argued that popular music and its attendant body of historical knowledge are yet to gain

much legitimacy in our secondary or tertiary institutions. In a recent discussion (April 2002), the Director of a large Queensland Conservatorium of Music made it clear that he had difficulty developing a research mentality amongst his staff. He put that down to the traditional expectation of performance excellence required by most tertiary institutions of their music faculty members. He further suggested that while it was difficult to encourage research in traditional areas of music, genres outside that field, for example popular, were addressed even less. And unfortunately, the longer this situation takes to change, the greater the danger that an important part of the history associated with music making in Brisbane will be lost forever. The danger is that the people who have stories to tell, people who lived, worked and played in Brisbane in the late 1950s and early 1960s, will die without ever having the opportunity to recognise the potential for their memories to form a vital cog in the set of historical wheels that will enmesh to define Brisbane at that period of time.

As an oral history, this project is about two things:

- ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to learn a little about a period of significant change in the lives of Brisbane inhabitants from as wide a range of sources as possible.
- providing music educators and students with a point of departure to their involvement in a music history and music education process that is representative of the democratic society in which Brisbane's rock 'n' roll developed.

The first step in the project involved a number of people associated with various aspects of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane from the mid 1950s to the early 1960s recording their memories in the form of conversations. Some of the participants also shared photographs and other memorabilia, often with accompanying recorded commentary. Bearing in mind that people who would not normally have the opportunity to tell their story were the main focus of the project, there were four main challenges.

The first (and foremost) challenge was to begin a process of documentation that encompasses the memories of the coming of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane. The second challenge was to provide the opportunity for the participants to gain recognition not only for the role they fulfilled as cast members in the play that was Brisbane's rock 'n' roll almost fifty years ago, but also for their role as present day historians in sharing their memories and memorabilia of that period. The third challenge was to give recognition to rock 'n' roll as a vital spoke in the wheel of cultural, social, economic and technological change that rolled through Western countries during the mid-twentieth century in a procession that had an ongoing influence on the lives, not only of young people but of the general population. The fourth challenge was to confront the common sense understanding that associates music education and music history with the "autonomous, unique and sacred" (Zolberg 1990).

Szatmary, in his book *A Time to Rock – A social history of rock 'n' roll*, demonstrates "... how rock-and-roll both reflected and influenced major social

changes during the last 44 years" (Szatmary 1996, p. xi). In building his explanation, he expands on six main themes throughout the book – (1) the significance of African-American culture to rock music; (2) the post-war population growth; (3) the post-war economic prosperity; (4) technological advances; (5) the development of the rock music as an industry; (6) the rebellious nature of rock music (Szatmary 1996, p. xi – p. xiii). As a step towards democratic history, it is proposed that the memories, stories and artefacts gathered in this project be critically examined, especially by music students, from the perspective of the four challenges and six themes as listed above.

The close association between music education and the music history process is bound to continue and if the future association is to be representative of democratic traditions, the presently invisible Western bias (Wicks 1998, p. 55) of the present association needs to be challenged. The failure of the music history process and its associated education process to challenge and answer:

*... the most fundamental questions about the nature of music and its important relationship to human cognitive functioning means that our understanding of ourselves as a species, and our perception of the struggle for identity ... is woefully incomplete* (Wicks 1998, p. 57).

### **The procedure**

The result of this project has been a collection and documentation of memories and memorabilia from people who were mostly teenagers during the late 1950s and early 1960s and who had some involvement, both pro-active and reactive, in the music of the era. The major part of this thesis is presented in the

form of an oral history that focuses on the memories of ordinary people rather than of those who were in authority or who were successful in the popular music industry. To facilitate the storage of these memories, conversations with the participants were recorded on cassette tape. Where possible, photographs and other graphical items illustrative of the period were scanned and stored in digital format with comments on each item recorded on cassette tape.

As such, the project focused directly on the people whose stories would have been lost with their death. For example, Billy Thorpe is the most famous of Brisbane's early rockers. He spent his formative years in the Brisbane music scene in the late 1950s and worked in a number of Brisbane venues with several Brisbane rock 'n' roll musicians. No attempt was made to speak with him because he has the means as a result of his fame, his wealth and his books to tell his story or have it told (Thorpe 1996; Thorpe 1998).

For rock 'n' roll (or any music) to have been successful, there is a basic requirement of giver and receiver, someone to produce the music and someone to consume what has been produced, and for an oral history to adequately describe the exchange process that is music, the memories of both sides need to be considered. For this project, the givers were considered to be those who had a role in the production and presentation of music in venues around the city while the receivers were those who attended as patrons the functions that were run in the name of rock 'n' roll. It was considered important that the memories from both givers and receivers were included and valued in this project.

In order to make the resultant history as widely available as possible, all recorded material was converted to digital format and included on accompanying CDs. This means that not only can the user read what a participant had to say, s/he can also listen to a recording of how it was said. As well, photographs, a small number of recorded songs and a small amount of film footage have also been made available on CD.

### **The purpose**

The question “why do it?” could and should be answered with a simple response - “because it’s there”. And while such a reply may appear flippant when applied to the climbing of Mt Everest, it assumes a much more serious disposition when it is considered that the human beings with whom these memories reside lack Mt Everest’s ‘immortality’ - they will not always be there.

A search through those Australian institutions in which one would expect to find information regarding life in Australia during the period following the Second World War showed that almost nothing regarding the coming of rock ‘n’ roll to Brisbane has been collected for future reference. Even though the 1950s was a time that saw television, relatively portable flash photography, reel-to-reel tape recorders, transistor radios and Polaroid (almost) instant cameras, almost none of the historical by-product that may have resulted from the use of this technology has made it into the “official” archives. Unless something is done about this situation in the near future, the only way future generations will be able

to learn about rock 'n' roll in Brisbane will be from information as recorded by the authorities, an avenue that presents only a partial record of events.

While starting this project at any time over the past forty years may have created the potential for a better outcome, there is no better time than now to begin gathering and documenting. This was brought home many times during the gathering phase with two examples in particular illustrating this point.

Rob Tonge (see p. 320) counts the photos of his time with Brisbane's senior rock 'n' roll band, The Planets, as amongst his most treasured possessions. He rates his involvement in rock 'n' roll with The Planets as one of the high-lights of his life, second only to his family and ahead of flying multi-engined passenger aircraft as a career commercial pilot for Ansett. Though his own children may be aware of the importance of these photos to him, Rob feels sure his emotional association with the photos will die out with him and that strong association will be diluted with the generations until their value (and probably the photos) will be lost.

The second example is even more complete. During the course of the gathering and documenting for this project, two of the important players in the script that was Brisbane's rock 'n' roll died. John Pickering, a vocalist with a number of bands from 1957 and John Bell (see p. 307), a bouncer and later manager who had a strong interest (and much documentation to support that interest) in preserving the history of the music and the period, both died before they could provide their own complete story.

## Some limitations

This project has a number of limiting factors the most obvious being that, in the interests of bringing it to some sort of finality, time restraints (and word count) required that the number of people whose memories could be recorded should be limited. It's a positive limitation though in that it provides a basis for other music educators and their students to continue the research.

Another limitation is that almost no attempt has been made to include documentation of Brisbane rock 'n' roll from a perspective of that which has already been recorded in notated form. This was done for no other reason than, barring some major catastrophe, these records (court, police, newspaper and parliamentary records for example) will be available well into the future. Research relating to them can be carried on as easily in the future as it can now. There are two exceptions. First is the search designed to list all the rock 'n' roll advertisements in *The Brisbane Telegraph* up to 1960 and the second is the scanning of *The Brisbane Courier Mail* for news articles relating to rock 'n' roll and its participants for the same time period. The first was done to provide a skeletal time structure to which the memories of the participants could be attached and the second was done to provide a little understanding, both to the participants and the readers, of the social and political environment in which these memories are rooted.

Few of the memories have been recorded on video, a limitation mostly the result of financial restrictions. It is compounded by the fact that even though

television and recording facilities existed in Brisbane in the late 1950s, no television footage and very little audio footage exists to help visually and aurally describe this facet of the city's history. Video recording these memories would have added another dimension to their storage for future use.

## **Reporting Outline**

This project is presented in two distinct formats, each inter-related. The first is in the form of a paper document that is obviously divided into a number of chapters that will be described below. The second is a multimedia presentation that stores in digital format all the audio and visual memorabilia that was collected. Such a format allows for the information to be retrieved and distributed by anyone who has access to a personal computer. For ease of access, it is also divided into sections that are accessed from a main menu.

In addition to being able to read transcriptions of memories related by participants as they are quoted in the text below, the reader is also provided with the facility to listen to many of those quotes. For instance, following a quote in the text may be a reference such as (John Bell 3.1). From this it can be deduced that John Bell supplied the quote, that there is an audio clip of the quote available on Disk 1 and that it can be found in Chapter 3 of the Chapters selection of the Main Menu

### ***The Paper Document***

As well as being divided into chapters, the paper-based section of this project may be scrutinized from within four sections. The first comprises a

chapter that relies totally on established chronicle and theory, specifically historical and methodological comment, the purpose being to promote the intellectual and cultural impact of a paper document. The second section, beginning at Chapter 2 and ending at Chapter 7, comprises a compilation of the participants' comments that is designed to tell their combined story. The third section is Chapter 8 and is in the form of a conclusion that is sub-headed "Where to Now?". Appendix 1 is the fourth section and contains a list of the participants and a little about each of them. So that the reader can become familiar with those who were directly involved with the project, an annotation, for example (Bob Halliwell, see p. 301), is added to the text immediately after a participant's name the first time it is used.

### ***Chapter 1 – Ideology, Theory and Praxis***

Chapter 1 covers the ideological, theoretical and practical aspect of the project. In the 'ideology' section, the author's ideological assumptions are discussed as a means of providing the reader with a better knowledge of the personal understandings that have helped to direct the project. Issues addressed in the 'theory' section include the concept of democratic history, the relationship between memory and history and the role of private and public memories in the history process. The theory section concludes with a brief discussion on the application of digital technology as a means of storing, interpreting and distributing the history that has been collected. The 'praxis' section deals with the practicalities of completing the project. It explains how contacts were made with participants, how conversations were recorded and

transcribed and how audiovisual material that could be collected was stored digitally for presentation in the multimedia presentation.

### ***Chapter 2 – Coming Ready or Not***

Chapter 2 acts as a funnel in that it channels the rock ‘n’ roll picture very quickly from the international and national popular music scene to the Brisbane into which Bill Haley ventured in early 1957. The chapter begins with a brief examination of the coming of rock ‘n’ roll to Australia through the activities of Sydney based people such as Lee Gordon, Johnny O’Keefe and Col Joye and through movies such as *Blackboard Jungle*, *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Wild One*. With rock ‘n’ roll well established in Australia, the next step is to examine the political situation in Queensland into which rock ‘n’ roll was about to enter through its capital, Brisbane.

Economic and cultural globalisation forms the basis of the third step as the effect of the ability of the United States to advise the rest of the world in great detail and with some immediacy via press, movies, radio and recording of the improving lifestyle of its citizens is examined. Australian music between the wars and the effect of World War 2 on the Australian popular music scene are also included in this step. The next step examines the moral panic that was associated with the coming of rock ‘n’ roll to Brisbane through topics such as bodgies and widgies, teenagers and the radio. As a result of the recognition of teenagers as a social group, the radio grew as an important influence on Brisbane and the chapter includes a discussion on the part Brisbane radio played

in the coming of rock ‘n’ roll. The final section of the chapter deals with the influence of the post-war migration program to Australia and the influence that program had on the Brisbane rock ‘n’ roll scene.

### ***Chapter 3 – Rock ‘n’ Roll Comes to Brisbane***

The first section, which is entitled “The Dances and the Dancers”, looks at Brisbane rock ‘n’ roll from each of those facets and examines the long-term influence that American soldiers had on Brisbane entertainment. Both radio and ‘the pictures’ played an important role in introducing rock ‘n’ roll to Brisbane and the experiences of some of the participants with these forms of entertainment are recounted to demonstrate this. The ‘Music and the Musicians’ section begins by discussing the unquestioned association by many people of delinquency with rock ‘n’ roll and ends with Betty McQuade’s (see p. 316) story of her involvement with the ‘jazz’ concerts run in the City Hall by Jim Burke. Given that almost none of the early musicians made enough from their music to become professional musicians, the day job assumed significant importance in their lives. So the chapter ends off with a section headed “The Day Job”.

### ***Chapter 4 – The Rock Sets In***

The rock truly set in during late 1956 and early 1957 and this chapter begins by telling a little of the story of Brisbane’s first two rock ‘n’ roll bands, the Rocketts and the Hucklebucks. With the formation of two bands rock ‘n’ roll could start expanding, so a timeline demonstrating that expansion is presented next. Most participants found it hard to remember exact dates so advertisements

from the Brisbane Telegraph form the basis for this timeline. Not all rock 'n' roll functions were advertised in the Telegraph, but enough are there to create a framework on which memories can be hung.

Chapter 4 concludes with a section entitled *The Authorities – A Different Perspective* which looks at the support young rock 'n' rollers received from some of the authority figures in their lives, in particular, their parents, their schools and their churches.

### ***Chapter 5 – The Equipment***

Brisbane rock 'n' rollers needed new equipment to play this new music and Chapter 5 attempts to place this new equipment as used in Brisbane in a historical perspective. Important in the story of how new equipment came to Brisbane is Ron Cleghorn (see p. 309), one time owner of the Nundah Music Centre. Ron bought the store just prior to the influx of rock 'n' roll and during his ownership, it changed from selling mostly pianos and sheet music to the largest suburban retailer of electric guitars, amplifiers and associated equipment in Queensland. Not all the equipment needed for the rock 'n' roll band was initially available from stores like Ron's so a section on homemade instruments is included. For the first few years of Brisbane rock 'n' roll, most bands would have had at least one guitar or amplifier that was home made. For instance, the band that performed on Brisbane's first television rock 'n' roll show featured a bass guitar that was fashioned from materials scrounged from the Sandgate dump.

All bands had to have a PA system for the vocalist even in the early days and their development from the five-watt tape recorder with a plastic microphone used by John Pickering on his first night at Mt Gravatt to the one hundred watt multi-channel unit built for the Planets is examined. The man who built that PA system, Tony Troughton, saw an obvious need for development in the field of electronics in Brisbane and the story of VASE, the company he put together to build amplifiers is told next. A story telling of his time in Brisbane forms an important section of this chapter that concludes with a short report headed "Prohibition, Brisbane Style". It tells of a Brisbane built 'instrument' that made no noise but made some people happy.

### ***Chapter 6 – Things Non-Musical***

Chapter 6 examines some of the decidedly unmusical aspects of rock 'n' roll. Physical violence was associated with rock 'n' roll dances in the minds of many people even though most of the patrons who attended dances were not involved in it. Most participants remembered the names of dance patrons who went on to be notorious in their field of criminality and it was often around these people that violence focussed. The police also had a significant involvement in rock 'n' roll and according to some of the participants, it was not always on the correct side. The bodgie squad became infamous for its exploits among the so-called bodgie (and the not so bodgie) element of Brisbane and it would appear to have been a fruitful training ground for police who were to be later implicated in institutionalised corruption in the Queensland Police as uncovered by the Fitzgerald Commission.

For the young rock 'n' roller, suitable dress was important and in this section, participants explain some of their dressing habits. This is followed by a section on the musicians union and then a discussion on competition between bands. The chapter concludes with a discussion called "Sex and the rock 'n' roller".

### ***Chapter 7 - The Planets: Brisbane's Gentlemen of Rock 'n' Roll***

The most successful and widely recognised band of Brisbane's early rock 'n' roll was The Planets and Chapter 7 is dedicated to telling their story from as many former members of the band as possible. Sections covered in this chapter include the formation of the Planets, the creation of their business organisation, their struggle for a big sound, their equipment, Birdland, the Globe Hotel and indoor cricket.

### ***Chapter 8 – Where to now?***

Not all the memories that were provided during the project could be included in the final presentation so the role of the conclusion is not only to indicate a finality to the selection process that led to this project but to emphasize the ongoing and changing nature of the history process by noting some starting points for future research.

### ***Multimedia Document***

The CDs are considered to be as important a part of this project as is the paper document. Disk 1 is closely aligned with this text and is accessed through a main menu. While many of the menu items can be viewed independently, it is

important that, when reading the second section of the paper document, constant reference is made to the relevant “chapter” section of the CD as explained above.

### **Photos**

This option provides access to the collected photographs and a commentary, where available, that is in both audio and text format. A slide show of the photos, without the commentary is also available.

### **Moral Panic**

A discussion on the “who, what, where and why” of moral panics appears under this option. It uses the text of the articles that appeared in the Courier Mail in the months leading up to the 1957 State election as a means of demonstrating the role played by the authorities in promoting such panics.

### **Rock ‘n’ Roll Timeline**

All the advertisements pertaining to rock ‘n’ roll that appeared in the Brisbane Telegraph between late 1956 and 1960 are available through this option. The presentation also draws attention to important points in that time line.

### **Rock ‘n’ Roll and Trams**

Brisbane rock ‘n’ roll occurred in the suburbs and so the public transport system was important. This option displays maps of Brisbane tramlines and the suburbs that were important to rock ‘n’ rollers.

### **The Jukebox**

The Jukebox did not enjoy good press during the late fifties but it plays an important role here in providing the user with access to audio of recordings made by early Brisbane bands, the Dominoes and the Planets, without having to insert any money.

### **Games**

This option provides a challenge, in games format, to the user's memory with regard to that which has been presented in the CD as a whole.

### **Video**

A very small amount of video footage is available through the Video Clips option.

### **Chapters**

Recorded memories are the basis of this project and their importance in illustrating points made in the various chapters of the written thesis cannot be over-stated. The Chapters option then provides the user with excerpts from the conversations to illustrate the point being made. It is recommended that the reader consider the "Chapters" section of the multimedia presentation in conjunction with relevant chapters of this thesis.

# Chapter 1

## Ideology, Theory and Praxis

The more we understand about how a historian has done the work,  
the better we can penetrate what the work is about.

*Stanford, cited in Holbrook (1992)*

### Introduction

The ideological, theoretical and practical aspects of this project are discussed briefly in this chapter. In presenting the ideological assumptions of the writer first, the political nature of the history process is assumed and reinforced from the outset. This is done to provide the reader with an understanding of the set of values that helped define the practice and reporting associated with the project.

In the 'theory' section, some conceptual issues in relation to the collection and storage of oral history are presented. Among these issues are the concept of democratic history, the relationship between memory and history and the role of public and private memories in the history process. Digital technology plays an important role in this project so a short discussion pertaining to its use as an aid in storing, interpreting and distributing history completes this first section.

The 'praxis' section deals with the practicalities of completing the project. It explains how contacts were made with participants, how conversations were recorded and transcribed and how the audiovisual material that could be collected was stored digitally for multimedia presentation.

## Ideological Assumptions

Few readers would disagree with the sentiments expressed in the epigraph to this chapter that suggests the greater the understanding the reader has of the way historical work was carried out, the greater is the potential for in-depth knowledge of the resultant history. In attempting to address history from a democratic perspective however, not only is it important to know about how the work was done, it is equally important to know about the person who coordinated the work and his positioning of the work within the theoretical 'pyramid' that frames the music research and music history process. In order to expose some of the epistemological and political baggage (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994, p. 140) that may have helped direct this project, it is seen as imperative that the author lay his 'ideological cards' on the table at the outset. This will be done under four headings, Research Issue, the Politics of Research, History Memory and Validity, and Difference. Many of the theoretical terms and concepts raised in these four sections will be dealt with in more detail in a later section of the chapter.

### ***Research Issue***

As has been mentioned earlier, popular music has only recently been included in the music education, music research and music history process. At the base of the theoretical 'pyramid' that has framed that process are writers and theorists such as Adorno (1962, 1978), Bennett (1982, 1986, 1999), Brittin (1991), Fiske, (1987, 1989), Frith (1986, 1987, 1988, 1992), Hebdige (1991), Middleton (1990) and Van der Merwe (1989) who have been influential in

leading and promoting wide and general academic discussion relating to the social and cultural role of popular music in post-modern Western society.

Further up the ‘pyramid’ are people such as Bjornberg (1993), Cutietta (1991), Dimaggio (1982), Elliott (1994), Vulliamy (1976, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984), Swanwick (1989, 1994), Shepherd (1983, 1987, 1991, 1991, 1994) and Wicks (1998) who have concentrated on popular music and the school curriculum on the international scene. Narrowing the ‘pyramid’ even further, popular music research and the school curriculum in Australia has attracted the interest of researchers such as Cullen (1990), Dunbar-Hall (1993), Lean (1993), Roylance (1995) and Walden (1996). As an oral history, this project is at the “sharp” end of the theoretical pyramid. Its guiding research issue is related to the role its participants play as historians in providing data for the history process rather than the theorizing that defines the roles of those researchers further towards the base of the pyramid. This emphasis is not to denigrate the value of the theorizing since the data gathered during the project is likely become the subject of theorizing in the future, but rather to emphasize the significance of a music history that is representative of the times in which we live because it is based on the experiences of as many people as possible.

### ***The Politics of Research***

This oral history recognises the political nature of the research process and as ‘openly ideological research’ (Lather 1986, p. 63), it acknowledges the political nature of the procedures that have shaped its development and progress. Guba (1990, p. 24) explains the political nature of research:

*If values do enter into every inquiry, then the question immediately arises as to what values and whose values shall govern. If the findings of studies can vary depending on the values chosen, then the choice of a particular value system tends to empower and enfranchise certain persons while disempowering and disenfranchising others. Inquiry therefore becomes a political act (emphasis in original).*

Music education in Queensland secondary schools is defined by a set of values that is:

*...overwhelmingly formulated in terms of 'serious' and 'classical' ... The underlying assumption has been that 'serious' music is somehow better than 'popular' music and that 'serious' music incorporates within itself 'objective' or 'absolute' criteria in terms of which all music can be judged and ranked in terms of its worth (Shepherd and Vulliamy, 1983, p. 5).*

Students with musical needs that are not seen as “serious” and “classical” are disempowered and disenfranchised by an education system which purports to value diversity. In attempting to address in a small way the disempowering and disenfranchising associated with traditional music education and music history, this project is designed to do something about the situation, that is, it is critical social research. According to Harvey (1990, p. 20) “not only does [critical social research] want to show what is happening, it is also concerned with doing something about it.”

### ***History, Memory and Validity***

In recognising that there can be no such thing as totally objective history (Dance 1967, p. 9) and that memory is a process of selection and redefinition, this project treats history and memory with similar objectivity. In notated form, history is a selected record of the past just as it is in memory and further, the

interpretation of history and memory is subject to past/present relationships and is therefore significantly influenced by experiences of the present and past. Neither history nor memory is about the past, but about the present and our interpretation and understanding of the various texts that comprise our understanding of the past. "Validity to the oral historian should not pertain so much to the somewhat misperceived 'realities' of documentation but to mutuality of meaning between the historian and their informant - their shared understandings of reality" (Holbrook 1992).

Middle-class analysts traditionally attempt to view the individual narrative with an academic arrogance that provides for its interrogation as an object free from personal feelings and prejudices. On the other hand, this project recognises that human beings are thinking subjects rather than objects of thought and that they and their culture are defined by their thinking and their past. With this in mind, the individual narrative as collected in this project sits well within the bounds of historically informed knowledge. "A concern with symbolic and cultural forms is *part of* historical and contemporary analysis, not just a problem of historical 'bias' in source material" (Johnson and Dawson 1982, p. 231).

### **Difference**

From the perspective of this project, the failure to recognise difference is oppressive. According to Young (1990, p. pp. 164-165):

*...blindness to difference disadvantages groups whose experiences, culture, and socialised capacities differ from those of the privileged groups ...*

*... the ideal of a universal humanity without social group difference allows privileged groups to ignore their own group specificity ...*

It is considered vital that difference be valued in this project from two perspectives. The first perspective refers to differences between the project co-ordinator and the participants. Given that the participants ranged from an alcoholic attempting to get his life back together to a retired university professor, and that the co-ordinator, as a post-graduate research student from a relatively prestigious university probably represented a privileged group in the eyes of many of the participants, difference was bound to have an influence on the project outcome. According to Edwards (1993), to candidly concede difference makes possible more open (and equal) interaction between the participant and the co-ordinator – a step towards historical democracy in action.

The second perspective refers to the whole of 1950s Brisbane and its inter-group and intra-group differences. Because the rock 'n' roll revolution was a change based on age rather than other social divisions, there were, nevertheless, very differing life experiences, culture and socialised capacities across young people as a social group in 1950s Brisbane. And between young people and the authorities of the time, the differences were even greater. This makes difference a very important factor in Brisbane's early rock 'n' roll history. Failure to recognise and document that difference lessens the impact of this project, the successful completion of which requires "not the melting away of differences but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression" (Young 1990, p. 47).

## Theory

### *Oral History*

While "oral history" is relatively young in relation to the methodologies associated with mainstream history techniques, (Thompson 1988, p. 22), as a means of gathering and reproducing details about human beings, it has a long connection with the lives of people whose stories are not usually featured in the historical texts generally associated with academia and its agents (Clifford 1994, p. 105). Talking with people is not a new method of assembling information. The ancient Egyptians, for example, interviewed the population for census information (Fontana and Frey 1994). A little closer to home, for forty thousand years Aboriginal culture has relied almost entirely on memory, speech, music and dance for the recording and passing on of its important social framework.

Even though personal documents, oral histories and life stories were recognised as important cultural and social definers of the lives of those with power and influence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was not until the 1950s that their collection "gained any proper recognition within sociology" (Plummer 1983, p. 39). From this time on, regular critical reinterpretations of the method that is now referred to as oral history has produced a tool that "... challenges the un-peopled version of history..." (Lummis 1987, p. 141) and "... gives history a future no longer tied to the cultural significance of the paper document" (Thompson 1988, p. 71).

The technology that is most closely associated with the modern history process and that has helped to confer documentary evidence with that cultural significance has been that associated with the printing press and it is this association that has played an increasingly crucial role in the definition of the term 'history'. Modern history has become so closely identified with and reliant upon documentary evidence that, for many of the historians officially charged with the task of 'creating' history, no paper has come to mean no history. Given that the means of production, legitimization and wide spread distribution of the paper document has been in the hands of those with wealth and power, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the modern requirement for history to be closely identified with documentary evidence has ensured that it has been recorded from the perspective of those who have access to this means of recording and reproduction. Mainstream history, then, has an almost total reliance on documentary evidence and so a bias towards the institutions of the elite.

*Writing history is a political act. But established history, using the paraphernalia of archival sources and written documentation, is almost always about winners and losers. This is because the articulate, the literate, the rich and the powerful - usually in government, business or the bureaucracy - are the ones who leave or deposit such sources.* (Fitzgerald 1990, p. 68)

The commonsense assumptions associated with the "paper document" as history result in some contextual tension when the words "oral" and "history" are used in conjunction. From the perspective of Western society, talking with people as a means of sharing historical information has often been associated with those of lower social and racial status or the non-hegemonic classes

(Portelli 1998, p. 67). The resultant instituted lack of respect is not culturally universal though, as writers like Vansina (1973) and Haley (1973) show. In the African tribes they discuss, people charged with reproducing orally the various histories of those groups were treated with great respect. As will be discussed below, video cameras, tape recorders and digital technology have provided the post-modern historian with the opportunity to treat oral evidence and its bearers with the respect that it enjoys in non-literate societies (Lummis 1987, p. 27). It is proposed that dealing respectfully with the memories of all people's lives in changing historical contexts provides oral history with the potential to democratise the process of history gathering in post-modern society (Plummer 1983, p.81).

### ***Oral/Aural – an interface to democratic history***

What steps can be taken that will allow historians of the present and future to treat memories with the kind of respect that has traditionally been afforded to documentary evidence? While the possible steps are many and varied, this project promotes the concept of democratic history, that is a (music) history of the people, by the people and for the people. It has been suggested above that because what is referred to as the history of WEAM has its roots in colonialist Europe and that because it is representative only of the experiences of the socially and culturally elite as they could be notated, it fails to treat all social and cultural groups with equal respect and relevance. It is therefore well outside what Wicks (1998, p. 55) refers to as the “democratic mainstream”. On the other hand, a music history that resulted from a gathering, recording and

theorising process which treated all social and cultural groups with equal respect and relevance would be well inside that “democratic mainstream” as well as being representative of the political system that defines twenty-first century Western society.

From the perspective of this project, a starting point on the path to a democratic history is the concept of an “oral/aural” interface. An interface is a point where two systems interact and in their interaction, create something new. In this project, the interaction between the oral (that which is shared in the form of spoken words) and the aural (that which is heard and recorded for future reference) creates a new pathway defined by that interaction and which points towards a democratic history. The pathway will contain many challenges, none greater than the gulf that has been constructed between oral history and mainstream history in Western culture (Grele 1998). It is proposed however that, just as print and its associated technology helped to map the path to the modern history process during the past five hundred years, digital technology has the potential to meet the challenge of the memory/history gulf through the oral/aural interface and in so doing, carve out a path to a post-modern history process that is representative of the society from which it emanates.

The application of digital technology to the history process establishes potential for the creation of an “oral/aural” interface that recognises and values not only the written document but also provides pathways to the recognition of spoken memories, both public and private, of those with first hand experience. Importantly, thanks to digital technology, a listener can experience these

memories with all their aural and visual nuances well into the future. As Norman Mailer said in 1970 when he was testifying at the Chicago Conspiracy Trial, "Facts, sir, are nothing without their nuance" (cited in Murray 1989, p. 34). Nuance is an important quality that is often not captured even by the tape recorder (though more likely by a video recorder) and that which is, is almost impossible to notate. In discussing the transcription of the reminiscences of the older community members with whom she deals, Mace (1998, p. 397) suggests that

*[t]he exercise of editorial control ... while it entails small decisions of detail, can make significant alterations to an author's meaning and purpose in any publishing enterprise ... and is often the most shadowy stage of the process.*

According to Portelli (1981, p. 97) transcription changes oral objects into visual objects and often results in significant loss. He writes, for instance, of the inability to notate silence as well as tone, volume and speed inflections, each of which can add subtle and often not so subtle meanings to the dialogue. As well, the decision about which punctuation mark to insert at which point in order to make the transcript more readable is often made with reference to a set of grammatical rules which is of little significance or interest to the narrator.

*By abolishing these traits [silence, tone, volume and speed inflections] we flatten the emotional content of speech down to the supposed equanimity and objectivity of the written document. This is even more true when folk informants are involved: they may be poor in vocabulary but are often richer in range of tone, volume and intonation than middle-class speakers who have learned to imitate in speech the monotone of writing* (Portelli 1981, p. 99).

In emphasising the significance of the recorded message, it is recognised as important, not only what was said, but also, of equal importance, how it was said. Such subjectivity is difficult to reproduce reliably through the transcription process.

A significant part of the history of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane at this point in time resides, not in the libraries and museums, nor in the academic literature, but in the memories of those who lived through the post war period. All Queenslanders were influenced either directly or indirectly by the social, cultural and economic changes that defined the period and that were in turn influenced by rock 'n' roll. The 'writing' and 'talking' of this history therefore require that memories be recorded, and most important in this process will be the participants, those who have a story to tell or an experience to relate. While it is recognised that the passage of time, amongst many other things, will influence how the past is remembered, it is important that as much subjective information as possible is recorded, "not the naïve delusion that one has trapped the bedrock of truth" (Plummer 1983, p. 14).

Studs Terkel was influential in promoting discussion with regards to the tensions between history and memory evident in the above citation from Plummer. In his comprehensive record of life in America during the depression, *Hard times: an oral history of the great depression* (1970), Terkel suggests that his book is about the memories of the people he interviewed rather than the cold, hard and often brutal facts of the time. Such an approach provides the reader with the opportunity to focus on the human being rather than on

someone's perception of historical facts. In reviewing the book, Frisch (1979, p. 70) suggests that:

*[t]o read through the enormous range of personality and experience presented in the book is to encounter, in a sort of multimedia exposure, the depth and drama of life in the Depression. As has virtually every other reader, I found it moving, poignant, intense, human, and instructive.*

And where does the truth fit into all of this? According to Terkel, "in their rememberings are their truths" (cited in Frisch 1979, p. 74).

### **Conversations**

The traditional method of gathering information for an oral history is the interview. However, the widely held assumptions as well as the political and academic baggage allied to the process of interviewing presented some difficulties as far as completing this project was concerned. In the triangle shared by memory, the oral and the aural, equality and respect assume prominence in a process of speaking and listening, a process which, it is argued, can better be defined by the use of the word 'conversation' rather than 'interview'.

Baum and Hadwick (1988, p.95) suggest that interviews "... are guided by a skilled and knowledgeable interviewer...". They seem to be suggesting it is the skill and knowledge of the interviewer that makes for success, "not spontaneous conversations which are better suited, perhaps, for a folklore collection." Cranfield (1997) shows that some writers have tried to overcome this problem by substituting words and thus the meaning associated with the

process - "discourse" for "interview" and "interlocutor" for "interviewer". It is proposed that very little is achieved by these changes.

Use of the word "conversation" to describe the time spent together by the interviewer and the interviewee assumes a commitment on the part of the interviewer to a sense of equality and respect. Such a commitment raises the potential for "intimacy, trust, disclosure and self-revelation" (Cranfield 1997, p. 2). Conversations provide for an environment where people can "tell history" (after Portelli cited in Cranfield 1997, p. 2) in a secure and respectful environment, knowing that their voice is as much part of the history they are telling as is their memory. In such a situation, the collection of oral history is an on going process, one that is logically impossible to complete, and one which, given the nature of the relationship in which conversations are held, will vary according to the state of the association. "Historical research with oral sources therefore always has the nature of a work in progress" (Portelli 1981, p. 104).

### ***Memory and History***

"Having never been well connected with history, memory continues to function as a creator of distance ..." (Frisch 1979, p. 75). One of the aims of this project is to address and thereby redress, in a small way, the gap between memory and history. The gap exists only while there are memories so death takes with it not only life but also the history associated with those memories. Myerhoff (1978, p. 73) quotes one of the Jewish immigrants she interviewed as saying: "It is not the worst thing that can happen for a man to grow old and die.

But if my life goes, with my memories, and all that is lost, that is too much to bear."

The memory/history gap has been reinforced in the post-modern era by a continued emphasis on the documentary methods of research which can and do produce history that lives on after death and have so successfully accommodated the academic professionalism required by the historical profession - "... the historical profession is structured around the medium of the written word and is somewhat insulated in its academic setting" (Sipe 1998, p. 380). Nora, cited in Hamilton (1994, p. 11) suggests that the "emergence of history as a profession with a body of codified knowledge was a deliberate attempt to obliterate memory." Whether it was a deliberate attempt to obliterate memory could and should be debated at length. One thing, however, approaches certainty. The emergence of history as a profession redefined the importance of memory in relation to history and placed the political responsibility for the accreditation of that which will become history out of the realm of memory and into the hands of the socially and culturally powerful. Notated history then has been and is an important aspect of the modern definition of the social, cultural and economic power base in Western society.

Access to a recorded history is important to the social and cultural cohesion of a group of people. The mainstreaming of assumptions associated with a "historical *tabula rasa*" (Hamilton 1994, p. 13), or as Nora (1989, p. 7) puts it, a lack of "historical capital", has been an important process in stretching to its limits the social, cultural and economic gulf between the socially powerful

and the socially marginalised. Not insignificant in reinforcing this gulf has been the assumption that the foundations of truth are trapped in the academic sieve of those charged with researching and producing official histories. However, as Dance (1967, p. 7 and p. 65) demonstrates through discussions of the Battle of Hastings, truth and the notated record of the past do not necessarily coincide. It would not be unreasonable to suggest, then, that the truth as represented in academic history has as much to do with static, selected ideological representations, as with what actually occurred.

This project is not an attempt to dismiss completely the significance of traditional music history or its "myth of realism" (Tonkin 1990). Rather, it is argued that music history and its associated ideologies provide an ideal point of departure for this research. This departure has been initiated by a tension that is evidenced in two ways. First is the common sense though misguided understanding that what has been recorded by music historians and presented in educational institutions as **the** history of music is representative of the musical experiences of people across a wide range of the social and cultural spectrum. Second is the need to ensure that the present, in the form of those who are still alive and have stories to tell, is not similarly only partially documented for future generations. An understanding of this tension creates the potential to discover and highlight subjective understandings, understandings which have been continually reworked and mediated in the mind of the storyteller within a past/present dichotomy, until the point of recording (Johnson and Dawson 1982, p. 211). It is also this tension that provides the motivation in this project to seek

out the stories in the form of memories rather than to accumulate facts (Cross and Barker 1998, p. 246). This is not to say that the facts available through written sources should not be collected. No research concerning a historical time for which living memories are available "is complete unless it has exhausted oral as well as written sources ..." (Portelli 1981, p. 104).

It is these stories in the form of memories that bring us to the reason for this short discussion on memory and history. The ability to record memories as stories for future theorizing has the potential to define a new and very different role for the historian. Frisch (1979, p. 73 - 74) suggests that since many traditional historians are prisoners of their methodological past, they place oral history at either end of a spectrum ranging from "more history" to "no history". On the other hand, interviews, he suggests, provide the oral historian with the opportunity to focus on:

*...what the interviews really represent rather than what they can not claim to be. In these terms, the question of memory - personal and historical, individual and generational - moves to center stage as the object, not merely the method, of oral history (Frisch 1979, p. 74).*

With memory as a primary focus of oral history, new questions arise which examine the journey from experience to memory to history and then "... the relationship of [that] memory to historical generalisation" (Frisch 1979, p. 74). The search for answers to these questions places oral history somewhere between "pure memory, with all its faults, and pure history, with all its limitations" (Frisch 1979, p. 75).

Grele (1985, p. 128) makes a similar point from another angle. He argues that in order to "seriously critique any form, it is necessary to understand precisely what one is about to evaluate". His argument is that oral testimony in the form of memory should be differently placed on the more/less history continuum to documentary evidence and thus critiqued accordingly. "It is quite possible to argue ... that oral testimony or 'literature' has its own characteristics and is not to be understood by the application of literary standards of judgement" (p. 128).

### ***Public and Private Memory***

The impetus for beginning this project was provided by the need to balance the long-established understanding of music history as addressed in educational institutions with an awareness that there are alternatives, alternatives that relate to the musical experiences of people not normally associated with the historical process. The Popular Memory Group at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies suggest that there is a tension created by an interchange between what they refer to as public and private memories (Johnson and Dawson 1982, p. 207).

Public or dominant memory is that which is played out in the theatre of history on a public stage furnished with the "historical apparatus" associated with the dominant social institutions, much as has been alluded to above and what Dance (1967) considers to be not the past but a record of the past. In contrast, private memory is that which often goes unrecorded and circulates in everyday talk in personal cultural forms such as letters, diaries and photo

albums and in so doing, often acquires the level of popular myth (Johnson and Dawson 1982, p. 210). As such, it remains unreported and is frequently silenced. It is argued that our private memories are composed in a manner designed to maintain our level of comfort in a changing world. "We remake or repress memories of experiences which are still painful" and compose and recompose them and others so that they support and assert our perceived position in the mutable domain defined by our knowledge of the past and present (Johnson and Dawson 1982, p. 301).

Bearing in mind that there is already a well rehearsed and well presented body of public memories in relation to the history of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane, this project will focus on Brisbane's people's private memories that have yet to be historicised. The major resource<sup>1</sup> then will be individuals' memories, memories which may or may not be an accurate representation of the past but which will contain the truth as defined to the individual by his/her current knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

For many historians, recognition of the truth in private memories and its connotation with the truth inherent in the empiricism associated with the traditional historical process creates tensions, which in part, result from an inability to adjust the common sense understandings associated with the historical process to accommodate private memory. According to Johnson and Dawson (1982, p. 219), these tensions revolve around (1) the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the word 'resource' in relation to the memories of human beings is typical of the tensions created by using the traditions associated with public memory to elucidate those of private memory.

historian's empiricism, (2) his/her lack of confidence in the individual narrative, (3) his/her "tendency to identify the object of history as the past" and (4) his/her dependence on the social relations inherent in the research process.

In recognising that truth can be found in both public and private memories, that the narrative does have something to add to the history process, that history is about not only the past but also the past viewed from the changing province we call the present and that the process of writing history is political, this project recognises the tensions mentioned above not as a reason to discard the private memories but as an interface to a democratic history which recognises both the public and private memories that define Brisbane's rock 'n' roll history.

### ***Presentation***

It has been stated above that one of the goals of this project is to try to ensure that the history of the rock 'n' roll era in Brisbane is recorded for future generations from as many perspectives as possible. In some ways, this is a difficult task since it is almost impossible to foresee what information will be needed in the future to allow diverse and informed deliberations and theorization to occur. And with respect to the quantum changes associated with digital technology, it is even more difficult to foresee in the longer term how the information that has been collected will be stored, distributed and analysed. Print alone no longer offers enough scope as a storage medium. Wallot (1998, p. 371) describes how the "team responsible for the oral archives project of the Sécurité sociale in France" has addressed some of these issues.

*It distinguishes among three types of project: passive collection of testimonies with a view to use by future researchers (... the authors include in this category the work done by most American 'oral historians'); collection within the framework of a specific research project; and, finally, creation of oral archives (p. 371).*

From a different perspective, Thompson (1988, p. 237) suggests that there are three ways an oral history can be submitted. The first is as a "single life story narrative", the second is as a "collection of stories" and the third as a "cross-analysis". In the formal presentation of this project as a thesis, it will take the shape of a passive collection of testimonies in which each form, as described by Thompson, will be used at various stages. Initially, this project has been presented as a paper document supported by audiovisual material stored in digital format. However, according to Sipe (1998),

*[a]n epoch in the practice of history is coming to a close. For hundreds of years the printed word has been the dominant mode of communication for the historical profession, in shaping its basic assumptions and structures. Today, the printed word is being superceded by a diversity of communication forms with the greatest impetus coming from moving pictures. (p. 379).*

While the universities through training continue to maintain a strong influence on the history "process", it seems that this may be coming to an end. The technology available to today's historian has changed significantly in a process that would appear to be being lead from outside the academy.

Digital technology has opened up the potential for emotional as well as intellectual information gathered in oral and other forms to be collated, stored and distributed in a much more convenient method than has ever been the case in the past. While tape recorders and video cameras revolutionised the method

of collecting oral information, digital technology has revolutionised the way it can be stored, examined and distributed. In discussing the use of the CD-ROM as a means of storage and distribution, Read (1998, p. 418) suggests that

*[t]he real strength of the CD-ROM in oral history is that it has the capacity to advance a mass audience towards an understanding of the intangible moments of the real interview. Text and sound together, especially when controlled by the viewer, is a much more personally involving form of communication than either a broadcast or a book.*

Flick (1998) suggests that the availability of interactive media to present history requires that the historian consider the audience in new ways by becoming aware of the desires, intentions and questions, not only of the people to whom the presentation is directed but also of the people who provided the raw material for the presentation. In this way it becomes public history. "Interactive media is therefore not only a tool for new presentations of history, but a tool for reflection on our roles and our craft itself" (Flick and Goodall 1998, p. 421).

Digital technology then, has the potential to redefine the history process through its ability to store and distribute "the written word, the spoken word, and the filmed word" (Sipe 1998, p. 383). History, in these forms, stored and distributed digitally should be seen as a "complementary source not a competing source" (Connell 1997). As such, it is hoped to show that "[d]igital history ... need not undermine our traditional purposes and can serve as a basis for compelling narrative history of the kind that has long served our needs" (Ayres 1999).

Using current technology and compression techniques (MP3 for example), many hours of conversation can be stored on one CD. With the rapid development and introduction of DVD technology, it is expected that during the life of this project, all the information gathered, including tapes, video, photos, recording and transcriptions will be able to be stored on one DVD disk in a convenient multi media format.

## Praxis

### *The Participants*

A basic task in beginning an oral history is that of finding people willing and able to participate. Access to many of the people involved in early rock in Brisbane was made relatively easy by the "rock 'n' roll reunions" which have been held in various venues around the city in October of each year since the early nineties. These reunions were initially put together by a group of "old rockers" under the leadership of a gentleman who was considered to be the guru of Brisbane rock 'n' roll, John Bell. John became involved in the Brisbane scene in the late 50s and worked in the management side of the industry until the late 80s. His goal with these reunions had been to bring together once a year the musicians and the patrons of those early times for a day of social and musical nostalgia. Sadly John passed away in September 1999. He was a contact point for just about everyone who was involved in the music side of Brisbane rock 'n' roll. He was the obvious starting point and remained an interested and important associate until his untimely death.

At the reunion held in 1998, a letter (see Appendix 5) was distributed to patrons advising them of the project and inviting them to contact me via telephone number if they were interested in being involved. Sufficient responses were received to begin the recording process. A goal of this project was to record conversations with as many people connected with the era as possible. As has been suggested above, it was considered vital that the exchanges were referred to as "conversations" and not "interviews" and it was interesting and pleasing to note that a couple of participants picked up on this and continually referred to the exchanges as conversations. The general approach to the recording of these conversations was to visit people in their homes and to encourage them to speak for between forty-five minutes and one hour on what they remember of the period in question.

The recordings were then transcribed and a copy of the transcription was sent to the person involved. A letter (see Appendix 3) that accompanied the transcript thanked them for their participation and asked them to read through the document and make any corrections that they felt were necessary. A stamped addressed envelope was included to facilitate the return of the adjusted document. Participants were also asked to sign a release document (see Appendix 4) giving permission for their name and the information they provided to be used in future research and publication.

While the initial recorded conversations were relatively short, they were designed that way so that as many people as possible could get a chance to tell their part of the history. It was also considered important that this whole process

happen fairly quickly given the age, health and in some cases, the past lifestyle of some of the people involved.

### **Newspapers**

*...the oral evidence which historians cite from newspapers suffers not only from the possibility of inaccuracy at its source, which is normally either an eyewitness account or an interview report by the journalist. It is also selected, shaped, and filtered through a particular, but to the historian uncertain, bias (Thompson 1988, p. 102).*

Brisbane newspapers were searched for two kinds of information. The first kind related to the advertisements that were placed in the papers, particularly the *Brisbane Telegraph*, promoting the various functions, venues and the bands that were playing at them. This information was used to supplement the information regarding dates that participants supplied. It is accepted that, unless definite steps have been taken to record actual dates, those supplied in conversations are an approximation. Newspaper advertisements often provided support or otherwise for these memories.

The second had to do with the news and editorial content of the newspapers. These were considered less reliable as an indicator of what actually happened and more an indicator of the authoritative view. Where possible, these comments were included to indicate an alternative perspective.

### **Publicity**

The publicity of the project to date has taken the form of:

1. Flyers handed out during a visit to a rock 'n' roll reunion (mentioned above),
2. An article in Brisbane's free newspapers,
3. An interview on radio.

The flyers handed out at the rock 'n' roll reunion proved to be important since it opened up a new channel of investigation, that of the dancers who attended the venues in the late 1950s. A number of these people were contacted and had their stories recorded, each providing a very different perspective to that which the musicians and promoters provided.

A visit to a reporter at Brisbane's Quest Newspapers in January 1999 resulted in a short paragraph being inserted in all the free suburban newspapers delivered in and around the city. The paragraph described the project and invited interested people to contact me on a 1300 (cost of a local call) number. This resulted in a good number of contacts and opened another door to advertising. Staff at the 4QR Breakfast show saw the article and the host did a telephone interview with the author that was broadcast at about 7.20am in mid February 2000.

### ***Photographs***

Photographs of the era are relatively scarce, partly because photography was somewhat less convenient in the 1950s than it is today. It was made very clear by a number of people that to have a photograph taken in a hall forty-five years ago meant some considerable expense since the use of a flash often required that the photographer carry with him a large and cumbersome battery. This meant that inside and night photos of the very early days were quite expensive at a time when there was not a lot of money to go around. Gathering photographs then is seen as an important part of this project. A number of people have a few photos and were happy to make them available. They were

less happy to allow them out of their possession. To overcome this difficulty, a scanner and notebook computer accompanied me on all visits and where possible, photographs were scanned for digital storage. Over two hundred photographs were scanned, named and stored according to their owner. This will allow future researchers to be able to identify the owner should it be necessary to obtain an original. The owners were also asked to describe each photograph and a tape recording of the description was kept.

### ***Other Audio Visuals***

Access to sound, video or movie recordings is even more limited than still photographs. Audio recordings of those early days were made on material that degenerated over the years and unless the owner took steps to have the sound transferred to a more durable medium, such tapes are well and truly past their use-by date. A good example is the small number of such recordings of the very early Bee Gees recorded in 4BH studios and backed by **The Dominoes**. They were in and around Brisbane for some time but have since been lost. One participant, Alan Campbell (see p. 308), was far sighted enough to transfer some recordings he did with his band in the late 50s from acetate to more durable cassette tape. The recording of Alan's band **The Dominoes** was done at 4BH studios in October 1959 and was engineered by a young Bill Gates, then a DJ at 4BH. Alan provided a copy of that tape which was transferred to digital format and suitably stored to provide for public access to the recordings.

Even though Brisbane was several years behind the southern capitals in getting television, local stations were very quick to include live, local rock 'n' roll

in their program line up. However, no examples of these early shows exist because the tapes on which these shows were recorded were used over and over by the station. It would appear however, that an early 4 Corners program on ABC looked in some detail at the surfing craze. Successful Brisbane band **The Pacifics** were featured on this program and there is footage of them performing in that program. Mrs Dulcie Day was a very early promoter of rock 'n' roll dances in and around Brisbane from about 1957 until 1965. Dulcie died recently but her husband, Tom, still has a short 16mm movie (several minutes) shot at one of the dances Dulcie ran at the Railway Institute Hall, in the very early 60s. It was transferred to digital format and is made available.

## Conclusion

A search of the local and national libraries and archives indicates that little work with regards to the documentation of the early days of Brisbane's rock 'n' roll history has been attempted. Ericson (1986) in his Ph D thesis entitled *The Band and Orchestra Movement in Brisbane to 1914* had to rely very heavily on newspaper reports to produce a history of bands and orchestras in the fledgling capital city of Brisbane. It has become very clear that if researchers of the future have to rely on newspaper reports to sketch a textual graphic illustrative of the introduction of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane, that graphic would be very misrepresentative.

While analogue technology in the form of the printed page has served the needs of public memory well for five hundred years, it is important that it should not continue do so at the expense of private memory. Oral history in

association with digital technology has an important and changing role to play in democratizing history by providing for the needs of private as well as public memory. The documentary explosion associated with the technical and economic revolution of the twentieth century has "led to a qualitative impoverishment of the paper-based documentary heritage" (Wallot and Fortier 1998, p. 367) and, given the modern day availability of relatively inexpensive and portable digital technology, it would be irresponsible not to do all in our power to attempt to redress that "qualitative impoverishment" and ensure that the musical present is not misrepresented to the future as the musical past has been to the present.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Coming, Ready or Not**

#### **Introduction**

The manner in which music is owned, produced, stored, distributed and consumed reflects the nature of a society from which it emanates. And further, as music is owned, produced, stored, distributed and consumed within a social context, important changes in a society will be reflected in its music (Longhurst 1995, p. 29). At no time in the history of Brisbane has this been more evident than during the past fifty years. The momentous economic, cultural, social, educational and technological changes that have occurred in that relatively short time span have redefined not only what is considered music, but also the society from whence it issued.

In Brisbane, the birth of a new kind of music, rock 'n' roll, corresponds with a visit by Bill Haley and the Comets in January of 1957. For many, this was a time of upheaval and for others it was a time of release but for all it was a time of important change. In this chapter, the birth which led to Brisbane's rock 'n' roll, from its Australian conception through its confinement, will be examined briefly.

## Rock 'n' Roll comes to Australia

As is the case with many births, the exact date of conception is difficult to pinpoint. The place of conception however is much easier to identify. Sydney became the "home of the rockers" (Creswell and Fabinyi 1999, p. 17) in Australia, so much of the discussion about the confinement that led to the introduction of rock 'n' roll into the Brisbane scene must focus on the goings on in that city. If the mantle "*Official Introducer of Rock 'n' Roll to Australia*" is to be bestowed on any one person, it could be thrust most uncomfortably on the shoulders of a North American who came to live in Australia.

### **Lee Gordon**

Lee Gordon is reputed to have "imported more than 400 US show business people for Australian audiences ... made and spent a self-estimated \$4 000 000" and in that time "not only become a faded legend but also, ironically, a pitiful showbiz embarrassment" (Byrell 1995, p. 121). He died in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1963.

As far as Australian rock 'n' roll goes, the most significant of Gordon's early adventures was two tours by Johnny Ray. Ray was not a rock 'n' roller, but he had had a number of hits in the United States and gained suitable notoriety as a result of his stage act and the banning in April 1954 of his cover of the Drifters song "*Such a night*" as being "too suggestive for American air-waves. On May 8, the BBC follow[ed] suit" (Ward 1995, p. 10). Moral panic abounded in the United States at this time and a Bill before the US House of Representatives (but not passed) requiring that the mailing or transporting of

"dirty records" be punishable by a \$50 000 fine (Ward 1995, p. 50) supported and promoted that panic amongst the middle class not only in the US but also in other western countries, especially Britain and Australia. As well as all this history, Ray presented a stage act that endeared him to his Australian patrons, many of whom during the first tour were provided with free tickets in an attempt to fill the halls.

As a result of his successful first tour, Ray was brought back to Australia in March 1955 and was mobbed wherever he went (Sturma 1991, p. 7). Teenagers were not the only ones to become excited about Ray's visit. Johnny James (see p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) was working at 4BH at the time and came up with an idea to give Johnny Ray a welcome to Brisbane that he and his fans would not forget.

*I thought of this idea of doing a welcome to him. We didn't have landlines too often in those days so what we did was this. George Hardman was the chief announcer at 4BH and he always wanted to be part of the action. He took out to Eagle Farm a bevy of 12 or 20 girls who all had little portable radios which were donated by Music Masters in Queen St, the big radio shop or music store there. These girls stood on each side of the gangway as Johnny Ray came out of the aeroplane and they were all tuned to 4BH. As a result, as Johnny Ray came down the stairs on to Queensland soil the first sound he heard was my dulcet tones saying, "Welcome to Queensland." He was quite taken aback with this because nothing like this had ever happened to him before. He was quite nice and turned cartwheels shall we say, to come and do all sorts of promos for 4BH. (Johnny James).*

It was these two tours which provided Gordon with the insight into an expanding market, a market which was prepared to pay large amounts of money to attend the latest, or what was promoted to them by Gordon as the latest, in American popular entertainment. Patrons paid between 9/6 and 39/6 for the Bill Haley Concert (*Courier Mail* 10/01/57, p. 9), the same for the Guy Mitchell, Stan Kenton, Lionel Hampton and Cathy Car concert (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 23/04/57) and 3/- for the first Rocketts dance at the Norman Park RSSAILA Hall (*Brisbane Telegraph* 17/05/57, p. 32). In spite of some near misses and because of some spectacular successes, it was Gordon who "invented the mass audience concept of live entertainment" (Bryden-Brown 1982, p. 31), a concept that was to propel American rock 'n' roll artists into an Australian mass market with youth as its focus.

Bill Haley's visit to Australia was significant for both Gordon and the Australian market primarily because of its timing - Haley was the first successful American rock 'n' roller to visit this country. His fame had preceded him as the result of the inclusion of his most famous hit, *Rock Around the Clock*, in the movie *Blackboard Jungle* that depicted the battle between an authority figure, a schoolteacher played by Glen Ford, and what many people of the time saw as community scourges, juvenile delinquents. Rock 'n' roll "became a rallying point for an emerging teen subculture that has already begun to embrace media-made models of rebellion" (Palmer 1995, p. 21) and Hollywood was not backward in "explicitly linking juvenile delinquency and R&B" (Palmer 1995, p. 21) in an effort to exploit a potential market, thereby promote financial success.

By the time Bill Haley arrived in Australia in early January, 1957 he had turned thirty and had extensive entertainment experience initially in the country music scene. His first concert in Australia was scheduled for Newcastle. There were public concerns about possible teenage rioting at this first concert, and in an effort to reassure the public that his concerts would be well controlled, Haley's manager is reported to have said that "at the first sign of trouble, ... Haley would stop the music and if that didn't work the band would break into *God Save the Queen*" (Sturma 1991, p. 11).

Haley played four sold-out Stadium concerts in Brisbane on January 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 1957 at 6.00pm and 8.45pm. He and his band the Comets were advertised as the "Stars of the Great Film *Rock Around the Clock*" (*Courier Mail*, 10/01/57, p. 9). In reporting the concert, the *Courier Mail* described Haley as a "big-boned, beefy man with a kiss curl coiled carefully across his brow" (*Courier Mail* 10/01/57, p. 3). The report said little about the music but commented more on the actions of the musicians and the activities of the audience. "The Comets, scarlet-coated, black-trousered and in white shoes, blew, banged and bounced in the converted boxing ring littered with amplifiers, instruments and microphones."

The piano player in the Bell Boys "stood at his instrument, occasionally playing it as if he were washing his hands vigorously, but more often improvising his own dances" (*Courier Mail* 10/01/57, p. 3). The Ian Gall cartoon on page 2 of that same edition depicted a couple of prisoners, obviously in Boggo Road jail smashing rocks with a sledgehammer. The caption reads "Rock, rock, rock -

beats me what that Bill Haley sees in 'em". Rogers (1975, p. 27) writes that Australia wide the tour "was predominantly reported in terms of the rock 'n' roll phenomenon and any concomitant riots or violence there might be around."

For Brisbane DJ Johnny James, Bill Haley's arrival had a marked effect on him. Prior to Haley touring Australia, rock 'n' roll did not play a great role in his life.

*It wasn't until Bill Haley came on the scene that I suddenly changed my mind. I met Bill and he asked if I could do his promotion for him in Brisbane. I was terribly thrilled at this, beside which somebody gave me some money too so that helped ... Rock Around the Clock was the very first [rock 'n' roll record] that we played. I've got an idea that either Rogers or myself would have played the first copy of Rock Around the Clock on 4BH at that particular time. ...Rock was not accepted because of the noise until Haley started. People started to go along and see this new sound and hear this new sound and see the new movement. Up to that time, musos stood on the stage and if they played a saxophone, they stood still. If they played a bass, they stood still. Haley changed that because everybody was jumping all over the stage. They had this choreographed work that they used to do so they just didn't sing a song, they acted the song too. They were pretty yucky songs at that particular time. They meant nothing, but the sound suddenly clicked and the beat suddenly clicked and all of a sudden, rock was born. Haley was the first one to do that. (Johnny James 2.2).*

Johnny became good friends with Bill Haley and one of his prized possessions from the early days of rock 'n' roll is a meal menu sent from an ocean liner.

*When Bill Haley came out to Australia, I was introduced to him and I was quite intrigued with his style because he was the first one to ever jump round on stage. This was quite amazing. For some reason Haley and I kind of clicked. We had a sort of a close affinity, we talked the same language and we became very good friends and as a result, Haley used to send Christmas cards and little greeting cards and little notes from all over the world. Of all the pieces that I got, I've only got one piece left. He wrote and said that he was going on the QE2 or whatever ship and he was going to have Christmas dinner there. I asked him if he wanted somebody to carry his bags. The next thing was that I got a menu from the boat telling what was being served. It says on the front, "Dear Johnny, The Queen is having a rough day, waves 35 feet high. Thanks for everything, Bill Haley." I was quite pleased to get that. He used to send me Christmas cards every year. This was 1957. (Johnny James).*

Over 20 000 patrons attended the concerts in Brisbane (*Courier Mail* 11/01/57, p, 3) and by the time the tour was finished, over 300 000 people had seen the shows (Sturma 1991, p. 12). Gordon continued promoting his Big Shows and in April 1957, he featured Guy Mitchell, Cathy Carr and the bands of Stan Kenton and Lionel Hampton (*Courier Mail*, 24/04/57, p. 3). Later that year, another Big Show brought Gene Vincent and his band the Blue Caps as well as Little Richard, Eddie Cochran and Alis Lesley to the Stadium. It was reported as the "noisiest night a stolid, officer-led police squad could remember" (*Courier Mail*, 04/10/57, p. 3).

## Brisbane in the 1950s

The Brisbane to which rock 'n' roll came in the mid 1950s was somewhat different to its southern counterparts. Rural interests dominated politics for much of the first half of the twentieth century in a state that was less industrialised and attracted fewer migrants than did the southern states (McQueen 1979, p. 42). Because Queensland had not been considered a suitable place to build factories associated with the war effort, its capital had not benefited from industrial expansion associated with the war effort and so this, in combination with its pre-war rural bias left the state struggling very slowly into the 1950s (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 135)).

So strong was the rural influence within the Labor Government in Queensland that it was able, in 1949, to introduce to parliament an act which divided the State into four zones with the number of voters required per electorate in the country areas significantly lower than that required in the south-east corner. So Brisbane began the second half of the twentieth century as the centre of operations for a well entrenched rurally based conservative Labor government that was, as a result of the predominantly private school secondary education in the state, "establishment focussed" (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 140), and an opposition which was also predominantly rurally focussed.

*Without doubt Queensland was (and probably still is) the most backward Australian state in the field of education. In the early 1950s Queensland retained a low leaving age of fourteen and an outmoded Scholarship examination introduced in the 1870s. (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 141).*

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For almost forty years and ending in 1957, Brisbane hosted a rurally biased Labor Government that depended for much of its support on the Australian Workers Union (AWU), which represented the views of the rural workers and which promoted their understanding of the "good life" as morally respectable and therefore desirable, and on the Catholic Church, both through its clergy and the infiltration of the public service by its lay people. As a result, by the change of government in 1957,

*...two-thirds of Queensland's 91 senior public servants had entered the service with Junior or lower qualifications. . . . The public service tended to be not only catholic and Labor, but also rural-minded and inept.* (McQueen 1979, p. 44)

### **Censorship**

It is not surprising then, in such a climate, that "folk devils" and their associated "moral panics" (Cohen 1973) abounded in the minds of those who would shelter Queenslanders from the evils associated with what they considered to be a threat to the Queensland 'way of life'. Many of these evils had to do with popular culture (often American) and the youth who seemed most often to be associated with its consumption. The most obvious of these "panics" resulted in the Objectionable Literature Bill that was introduced into Parliament in 1954. According to William Power, the Attorney General at the time, comic books were a "great menace in our midst today, one that threatens to destroy the very basis of our Christian civilization" (Finnane 1989, p. 220).

This Bill created the Literature Board of Review, usually consisting of four men and one woman, which was designed to ensure that only suitable printed

material was made available to Queenslanders and was to do its job with a minimum of fuss. Its business was to view all publications on sale in the state and withdraw any it thought were unsuitable. It was not required to provide reasons for decisions or listen to objections from those affected by the decisions. According to Fitzgerald (1984, p. 589), "censorship reflects the nature of Queensland society, its moral traditionalism, and the identification of the political elite with Christian fundamentalism and other 'conservative' ideologies."

### ***The Youth Problem***

With the defeat of the Labor government in 1957, the concern with 'youth problems' and 'folk devils' as displayed by the state's legislators didn't wane. In fact it could be argued that it increased in line with increased overseas concern, and prompted by stories (such as those of the Mods and Rockers from Britain) emanating from other Western countries relating to the increasing social, cultural and economic influence the newly named "teenager" was able to exert. This concern was obviously recognised by the police and the newspapers as emotive headlines in late 1956 demonstrate. At around the same time as the Olympic Games were being held in Melbourne, *The Courier Mail*, in the lead up to a Queensland election, was championing the youth issue with headlines such as "Police will be ready for rioting youths" (*Courier Mail*, 23/11/56, p. 6), "Police seek 4 bodgies" (*Courier Mail*, 05/12/56, p. 3) and "Court told of rock concert: 'You cops won't stop us'" (*Courier Mail*, 11/12/56, p.11).

While the notion of juvenile delinquency was well and truly established in Britain by the middle of the nineteenth century (Magarey 1978), the assumptions associated with it weren't lost on Mr Alexander Dewar, a member of the new government elected in 1957. In the month leading up to the election on 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, 1957, community authorities ensured that the "youth problem" was kept on the front pages of the newspapers. Headlines on Monday July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1957 read "Bodgie Gangs in Three Outbreaks on Trains" (*Courier Mail*, p. 1). This was followed by "Why Grovely Breeds Bodgies - Nothing Else to do" (*Courier Mail*, 16/07/57, p. 2), "I Faced Bodgie Pack on Train" (*Courier Mail*, 17/07/57, p. 2), "Community Life Helps Badly Needed in Bodgie Area" (*Courier Mail*, 17/07/57, p. 3), "Youth Clubs trying to beat bodgie cult", (*Courier Mail*, 18/07/57, p. 2), "Build Park Soon to counter bodgies" (*Courier Mail*, 18/07/57, p. 3), "Groom says Public Should Back Clubs", (*Courier Mail*, 20/07/57, p. 3) and so on. A couple of days before the election, *The Courier Mail* reported the "Bodgie Threat [was] beaten" (29/07/57, p.3). The Police Commissioner supplied much of the text for the article:

*Street corner and milk bar congregations of Brisbane bodgies and widgies are disappearing. The Police Commissioner (Mr T. W. Harold) said last night that this was the "dividend of a firm but fatherly approach by police officers to Brisbane's bodgies. Police went up to these young people, gave them a talking to, and in most cases received co-operation," Mr Harold said. The police blitz on bodgies began 10 days ago following a flood of complaints about bodgie viciousness. ... "I am quite satisfied now that having taken that line of action, no one will be worried by bodgies for a long time," Mr Harold said. "We were caught unawares but we have the matter in hand now."*

After campaigning on the 'youth problem', Dewar took the lead early in the life of the new parliament by moving "that a complete survey and examination be made of every aspect of modern social conditions with a view to combating the problem of juvenile delinquency, one of the greatest social challenges of this age" (Irving 1991, p. 42). The resultant Committee on Youth Problems was appointed by the government in late 1957 and began its work by hearing submissions from the public in March of the next year. Mr Dewar, who represented the Liberal Party for the seat of Chermside, was chairman of the committee and four government backbenchers were appointed to assist him. The committee found strong support from within the community as the headline "Youth bodies hail delinquent probe" shows (*Courier Mail*, 27/11/57, p. 21). The Rev. T. Rees Thomas, World Council of Churches president and Queensland Council of Churches vice-president was quoted in the article as saying:

*Any move to solve the juvenile delinquency problem must take into account not simply the increase of playground and recreational facilities but also moral and spiritual factors. Seventy percent of youth clubs are run by the Christian Churches and such a government committee will no doubt seek the help of the Churches.*

Professor D. W. McElwain of the Queensland University's Psychology Department, in the same article suggested that:

*The committee might be able to investigate the possibility of psychology as a weapon against juvenile delinquency. This had been done overseas and his department would be happy to co-operate with the committee.*

The committee was overwhelmed by the number of groups and individuals wishing to make submissions to the committee (106 in all) and this

interest made the so called youth problem, with the often over-enthusiastic help of the local media, a major news item during 1958. As a result the "political initiatives by the conservative parties had created an issue of considerable saliency" (Irving 1991, p. 43). Dewar however found this saliency hard to maintain, even among the members of his committee and by the time the committee's report was presented to the Premier in 1959, youth problems were very much off the political agenda. The report was several months late partly because Dewar had difficulty getting his committee together.

To suggest that the "youth problem" in Brisbane at this time in history is solely the result of intra-state politics is to disregard the emerging economic and cultural globalisation that became evident in Western countries during the 1920s and 1930s and received an almost unstoppable boost as a result of the allied victory in World War 2. The trend can be most closely identified with the emerging industrial economy of the United States of America where, not only were some citizens able to benefit from the improved lifestyle associated with the era of mass production, especially in the field of consumer goods, but they were also very able to let the world know of their good fortune with ever increasing speed.

The decline of the once successful Australian moving picture industry in the first quarter of the twentieth century provides a good example of how American culture was exported around the world. This trend away from all things British towards American culture was not allowed to go unheeded and in 1927 a Royal Commission into the moving picture industry in Australia

recommended, in response to the change, that there should be a "Board of Censors with at least one woman and an Empire quota to ensure that exhibitors should ... 'go out of their way to find British productions'" (White 1980, p. 277).

Music has always been influenced by technological advances and Australia, even the 1920s and 1930s was not immune from these technological advances and changes even though few, if any, of the associated inventions occurred within the country. Many of the traditions and styles associated with popular music in early twentieth century Australia had been inherited from Great Britain and so music distribution depended firstly on live performance by professional artists to make a particular song well known followed by its distribution in the form of sales of printed sheet music, most of which originated in one form or another in Britain.

The invention of the gramophone record and its attendant ability to store and reproduce music removed the need for the music consumer to learn to play an instrument and thereby posed a great threat to this mostly British sheet music industry. The technology associated with, first of all making these records, and then being able to reproduce the sound in the consumer's home emerged from America and as well as exporting the technology they also exported their culture in the form of recordings. American music, particularly in the form of jazz, was made available to Australians who could afford it. By the 1920s, American Edison gramophones were to be found in many Australian homes playing recordings of American music manufactured in Australia by RCA of America (White 1983, p. 115).

Radio played an important role in distributing the cultural exports of Britain and America and the struggle between the two was not lost on legislators. 'Highbrow' programming associated with Britain was broadcast initially over a group of radio stations financed by a licence system that required a yearly fee be paid to the government for the right to own a radio. This group of stations was taken over by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) in the early 1930s and continued to cater for a minority. 'Lowbrow' programming, which depended much more on American content, was left to the commercial stations that addressed a much larger market. By 1936, 65% of working class homes had a radio and by 1940, 1 213 000 radio licences had been issued in Australia (White 1983, p. 115). So by the beginning of the Second World War, there was an ongoing and vigorous debate over the rights and wrongs of the Americanisation of Australia and its culture.

The outbreak of World War 2 helped to place the debate about the globalisation of culture, particularly in relation to Americanisation, into the 'here and now' not only in Australia but also in most western countries. The entry of the United States into the war ensured that its recent isolationism was dismissed if not forgotten and its huge economic and industrial strength, much of which resulted from the mass production of consumer goods in the 1920s and 1930s, became valued as vital to the success of the allied war effort - "America was rapidly coming to represent the democratic way of life and all that was worth fighting for" (White 1980, p. 281).

## The Teenager

Australia became, through the necessity for self-preservation, a staging post for American troops bound for the war in the Pacific with the Eastern capital cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne bearing the brunt of this friendly invasion. Over one million American soldiers passed through Australia during the war years and while Americanisation was treated with contempt in some circles prior to the war, the cultural baggage which these soldiers brought into the country seemed to create less of a problem during the war.

Brisbane, as its contribution to the war effort and the future of Australia, was made "expendable" should the need arise. As a result, little industrial development towards the war effort occurred anywhere in the state of Queensland. On the other hand, as a staging post for American soldiers on their way to the war, Brisbane, "proportional to its limited population, hosted more visiting American GIs than any other western metropolis" (Evans 1997, p. 108). Such an influx of soldiers, and it is important to note that there were some black soldiers among the ranks, was bound to have an effect that lasted well after the war. According to Evans (1997, p. 108), the "socio-cultural outcomes were both profound and complex" and the group in which these outcomes would be most evident was the young.

By the late 1950s, almost twenty percent of Australia's population was in the age group that could be considered young. This was a significant increase on pre-war statistics and reflected similar changes in most other western countries. Not only did the percentage of young people increase, so did the

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economy and its associated prosperity. Australians of all ages had more time and money to commit to the consumer goods that they had seen American servicemen using during the war.

"The Teenager" was a term that had not been widely used prior to World War 2, because, as a group, young people did not have the economic clout to have much influence in the consumer market. Children of the day, (and they were considered to be children until they became financially, or in some other way, independent), remained part of the family and espoused the values promoted by the family. In the post war period however, young people, for the first time in history, had access to relative wealth and leisure, thus creating a consumer demand that was easily addressed by business as part of an expanding economy. At the same time however, they were demanding social and cultural changes that were seen as threatening to the traditions promoted by the authorities. It is as a result of these demands, and the struggle to have them met, that the teenager became an identifiable and potent force in Brisbane society.

American popular culture proved to be an alternative, defiant culture for teenagers while comics, movies and music developed as suitable vehicles for its promotion. Movies such as *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* were widely viewed and hailed by teenagers and equally widely dismissed by their parents. Music got firmly into the act when rock 'n' roll songs by Bill Haley were included in movies such as *Blackboard Jungle* and *Don't Knock the Rock*. It was through these movies that most Australian teenagers became familiar with

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the music that was to define their culture. P. D. Spooner, critic for *The Courier Mail* was anything but impressed. His review of *Don't Knock the Rock* in *The Courier Mail* (09/02/57, p. 7) concludes with "... we were subject to some moronic dialogue, quivering dancing and monotonous rhythm."

The teenager became identified with American popular culture and its vehicles for distribution. Initially the vehicle, as far as music was concerned, was the movie but changes in technology moved that responsibility to radio and the 45rpm record. Brisbane radio began playing rock 'n' roll in early 1957 and it was this rock 'n' roll which was promoted by the authorities as being responsible for many of the problems associated with teenagers. Hugh Lunn remembers:

*Brother Adams ... strayed onto sex when he gave a lecture about the dangers of rock-and-roll, now that Elvis Presley had everyone all shook up with "Jailhouse Rock", which made people involuntarily want to shake their bodies to the music. Brother Adams warned that jiving with a girl could break down the respect you had for her. I never could understand this. The government hadn't banned any rock-and-roll songs, but a few years before, they had banned a really slow number which began: "When you're dancing and you're dangerously near me, I get ideas ... I get ideas." (Lunn 1989, p. 232).*

### **Bodgies and Widgies**

Of much greater influence than their numbers would indicate, bodgies and widgies were a "phenomenon" peculiar to Australia and New Zealand. Although similar groups existed in Britain and their dress styles emanated from the United States, the names allocated to these groups were used only in the Antipodes. An early study into their behaviour and lifestyles by Manning (1958) seemed to suggest that membership of these groups was an affliction often

caused by what he saw as the evils (for example, lack of respect for the traditions of the past such as religion and secure home life) associated with a changing society. In Manning's view, such afflictions, as the name *The Bodgie: A Study in Psychological Abnormality* (1958) of his booklet suggests, could be treated and healed.

According to Stratton (1984), there were two distinct groups of bodgies and widgies in Australia. The first group was self named, grew out of the post-war social environment and by six or seven years after the war, was in decline. By 1954/5 however, the press had seized on the alternative nature of a relatively small group of youth identifiable by their behaviour and their clothing and had begun using the terms bodgie and widgie in a derogatory and divisive manner. The two terms became associated with the 'evils' of youth in the 1950s in much the same way as did the term "juvenile delinquent" a century earlier (Magarey 1978), and according to *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1956, 'bodgie' and 'juvenile delinquent' were synonymous (cited in Stratton 1984, p. 13).

It has been suggested above that following the war, Queensland was a conservative heartland. Its capital city was the least industrialised of the mainland Australian capital cities, a rurally biased political party had governed it for forty years, the education system was the most backward in the country and the Catholic Church was able to exert strong influence over the moral direction of the state. It seems reasonable to suggest then that Brisbane as capital of the state was fertile ground in which powerful social groups could "create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying

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those rules to particular people and labelling them as deviants" (Becker 1973, p. 9).

The press was a willing mouthpiece in this labelling process and played its not insignificant role in ensuring that those most affected by the rules were designated with the less than flattering term, 'bodgie' or 'widgie'. In the process, the reading public gained a common sense understanding from a so-called 'authoritative' source that associated much of the trouble in Brisbane with young people who dressed differently and listened to rock 'n' roll.

### **The Radio**

In the immediate post war period, radio played an important and almost unchallenged role in providing for the leisure time of Brisbane families. In most cases, the radio was a large piece of furniture that held pride of place in the family living room. Such was the size and cost of each unit that most families had only one of them. It was reasonable to expect then that programming by radio stations was directed at family needs. For example, in the 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. time slot for one day during November 1957, programming for two Brisbane radio stations went as follows:

**4BC** - 6.0 - *Twilight Ranger*, 6.15 - *Clancy of the Overflow*, 6.30 - *Queensland Network News*, 6.45 - *Three Roads to Destiny*, 7.0 - *The Fatal Air*, 7.15 - *Golden Madonna*, 7.30 - *No Holiday for Haliday*, 7.45 - *The Girl From Nowhere*

**4QG** - 6.0 - *Serial*, 6.15 - *Latest and Brightest*, 6.30 - *Summary South Australian Tennis Championships*, 6.34 - *Sporting Highlights*, 6.39 - *Rhythm Pianist*, 6.44 - *Weather*, 6.45 - *Serial*, 7.0 - *News*, 7.15 - *A. B. C. Hit Parade*, 7.45 - *Any Questions*. (*Courier Mail*, 27/11/57, p. 21)

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Hugh Lunn in his book *Over the Top with Jim* (1989) gives a first hand description of listening to the radio in the 50s:

*Although we only got to go to the pictures once a week we had plenty of entertainment after school listening to the serials on our wireless in the lounge room. It was a brown cabinet wireless, standing on the floor and it had a long thin marker that swept around to choose your station. ...we could listen to "Search for the Golden Boomerang" and "Biggles" and "Jeffrey Blackburn's Adventures". At night ... there was "Pick-a-Box" with Bob Dyer". ... When we were older we listened to the boxing from the Stadium on Friday nights, and even though we never saw Mickey Hill or Stumpy Butwell, or even knew what they looked like, they were our heroes* (Lunn 1989, p. 88).

This comfortable situation for the radio stations was not to last for long. At the same time as teenagers were becoming more obviously culturally restless, television was introduced to Australia<sup>1</sup> and the transistor radio released them from a situation where the family made the decisions about their radio based leisure activities. Radio had to adjust to these changes and while rock 'n' roll had filled that void in America, it was less than warmly received by Australian DJs. For instance, after a DJ's convention at the Gold Coast in 1958, "*Elvis' was banned at this meeting*" was the headline that appeared in an *Australian Women's Weekly* report on May 28, 1958.

*By gentleman's agreement, the name of Elvis Presley was not to be mentioned. The disk jockeys or "Deejays" as they are called, felt that heavy heads after partying were painful enough without more punishment. ... Off air, the Deejays had hilarious sessions ridiculing "the four chords - moon rhyming with June" type of hits, the promotion of which makes some of them so fantastically successful.* (p. 5)

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<sup>1</sup> Channel 9 in Brisbane started on 16/08/59 to cover Princess Alexandra attending the Exhibition. The other channels started a couple of months later. Interestingly, Channel 9 in Brisbane was affiliated with Channel 7 in Sydney and Channel 7 in Brisbane was affiliated with Channel 9 in Sydney. It stayed that way until 1964. (Interview with Neville Ross, Channel 9 employee, 1999).

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Among the attendees at the convention were Brisbane DJs Bill Gates, Allan Lappan and Johnny James.

### **'Birch Those Delinquents'**

The Brisbane of the mid 1950s into which rock 'n' roll was to be unleashed was politically conservative and as such, was struggling to promote and reinforce the traditional family and Christian values which had been pushed into the background as a result of the urgencies associated with the war. Headlines such as "Birch those delinquents" in *The Courier Mail* on 27/11/56 demonstrate the attitude to youth in the state at the time. 'Perplexed' of Mayne, for instance, asks in a letter to the editor "why isn't legislation passed to ban rock 'n' roll from radio, screen, and Press, and also prosecute firms selling clothing which "makes" the bogie and widgie types?" (p. 2).

In spite of attempts to stop it, rock 'n' roll was first carried to the citizens of Brisbane in much the same way as it had been carried to the rest of the western world outside the United States - via the movies. It was in late 1955 that the movie *Blackboard Jungle* was first shown in Australia and according to Cohn (1970, p.20), it was a "corny old soapbox about juvenile delinquency and generalised teen hang-up. The opening sequence showed school kids jiving debauchedly in the playground and Haley was singing *Rock Around the Clock*". *Rock Around the Clock* was first released in the United States in 1954 as a novelty foxtrot and it wasn't until it was used in the movie that it became a world wide number one hit and an anthem to a group of people who had always been

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around but never been socially, culturally or economically delineated - the teenager.

It was not possible to listen to rock 'n' roll on radio in Brisbane because up until late 1956, it was not played on Brisbane radio stations. According to Dennis Gilmore, "all the music played (in Brisbane anyway) or at dances were (sic) by artists like Jo Stafford, Perry Como, Doris Day, Eddie Fisher, Rosemary Clooney and Dean Martin. Which was fine if you wanted to go to sleep" (Gilmore 1995, p. 5). And later he argues that "one of the reasons why Rock 'n' Roll wasn't being played on the radio was the establishment of the day deemed it 'The work of the Devil' and would corrupt us all" (Gilmore 1995, p. 6). Bob Rogers, a disk-jockey on Brisbane radio station 4BH refused to play Elvis Presley's *Heartbreak Hotel* when he was first sent it because he thought it was "some sort of bad musical joke" and wouldn't go over very well with his audience (Rogers and O'Brien 1975, p. 20).

Johnny James explained how Brisbane radio stations would have the American magazines such as Billboard air mailed out immediately they were released in America and his station would have announcers' meetings each week and listen to the new records. It was either thumbs up or thumbs down. He remembers first hearing *Jailhouse Rock* to which his response was thumbs down. The rest of the announcers, who felt that because it was big in America it would be big in Brisbane, over ruled him. To Johnny, Elvis couldn't sing, couldn't play guitar and just threw himself around on stage (**Johnny James 2.1**)

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Allan Reed (see p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) had first hand experience at not being able to hear rock 'n' roll on Brisbane radio.

*The radio was very very anti rock 'n' roll. Johnny James, he worked for 4BH and he was the morning breakfast announcer. Only for Johnny I don't think we would have learned them ...In the very early days it was well nigh impossible to get any help from the stations. They had a guy by the name of Bill Gates, he was DJing. There was Bob Rogers, he gave rock 'n' roll a bit of a hard time, so I rang him up and told him what I thought of him. I told him where to go and how to bloody get there. Don't knock it, we're trying to make a quid. (Allan Reed 2.0)*

It must have become clear to radio stations fairly quickly that to refrain from playing rock 'n' roll was to risk not being part of an obvious and expanding market. For at least the latter part of 1956, teenagers had been able to attend city and suburban dances that included it in the repertoire. In mid 1956 when Jack Gilmore bought his Philips Carnegie Hall Hi Fi system and started running dances in the Mt Gravatt RSL Hall, the dances consisted of "foxtrots, waltzes, quicksteps and some new music called rock 'n' roll" (Gilmore 1995, p. 6). At other venues, areas were roped off to cater for those who wished to dance to the new music.

As Brisbane teenagers settled in to welcome the new year, 1957, the rock 'n' roll scene was to improve for them. Most important was a visit to the city by the man they believed started it all. Bill Haley and the Comets (et al) were on a tour of Australia promoted by Lee Gordon. On the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> January 1957,

four concerts took place at The Brisbane Stadium and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January the *Courier Mail* reported that:

*Bill Haley and his Comets shook a packed Brisbane Stadium into convulsive movement at the climax of their first rock 'n' roll concert here last night. Teenagers and some older men and women clapped, fluttered their arms, gyrated their knees and jiggled their heels. Whole rows of the audience swayed in unison from side to side, stamping and singing in time with the band. But there were no real attempts to dance or start a rush. An estimated 10,000 people attended last night's concerts. (p. 3)*

The interest of teenagers in rock 'n' roll and their financial and cultural independence must have been evident to the radio stations because it was around this time that Bob Rogers acceded to the demands contained in the many letters sent to 4BH and started programming rock 'n' roll. "Rock 'n' Roll hits in new 4BH show" was the headline announcing Roger's "bold" new step in the *Today's Radio Programs* column on page 7 on *The Courier Mail* of the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, 1957.

*Disk Jockey Bob Rogers, will introduce his new radio programme, Rock 'n' Roll, tonight, at 9 from 4BH. The programme will feature thirty minutes of the best in rock 'n' roll music from world famous bands.*

For DJ Johnny James, Haley's visit to Brisbane was a significant watershed in the life of Brisbane rock 'n' roll. Not only did Brisbane people hear the sound live from an international artist, they also saw a stage act that added great visual excitement to the presentation. Not only did the visit promote new musicians into the rock 'n' roll fold, it also encouraged established musicians to back rock 'n' roll artists.

## Migration

Like most other facets of 1950s and 1960s Australian life, Brisbane's rock 'n' roll scene was to be strongly influenced by people who chose to leave post-war Europe and settle in the land down under. Most arrived courtesy of the government sponsored 'assisted passage' program which led to many of them being referred to as 'ten-quid tourists' by locals who claimed longer residency status. In the first ten years after the war, more than half a million Europeans (mostly British) migrated to Australia while in the following ten years, the number more than doubled (Cockington 2001, page 121)

Tony Worsley (see p. **Error! Reference source not found. Error! Bookmark not defined.**) was born in Hastings, Sussex, England in 1942 and came to Australia with his family in 1957. He is forever grateful to the Australian voters and their government.

*... four girls and two boys and Mum and Dad. 10 quid. Thank you Bob Menzies and your grand parents ... [I] always had a dream of being a singer, always played truant, always climbed up trees and dreamt and that's the way I am ... I had won a talent quest in England and was gonna be a star for Decca Records but it didn't come off so when I came here I entered all the talent quests and won them. (**Tony Worsley 2.0**).*

Tony's mother (see p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) remembers the trip out from England. Tony had done his schooling in England and was fifteen when the family arrived in Brisbane.

*1957 we left and arrived in January 1958 ... We came on a boat. It took five weeks. We all came over on the migrant steamers - £20, that was £10 for me and £10 for dad and the six kids travelled free. (Mrs Worsely 2.0).*

They chose to settle in Brisbane

*My brother lived in Brisbane at Woolloongabba and he promised us a home for 12 months. He had previously been in the Royal Navy and he came out here after he'd been demobbed and he married an Australian girl and they lived in Redfern St at the Gabba and we spent 9 months with them and then Tony and his father got work at Robertson's Sports Store down in Stones Corner and we moved out to Mr Gravatt because all the 4 girls joined the marching girls at Mt Gravatt. They were all in different teams but all together. The 2 boys, eventually they went to work at Pickers and learned about ropes and things like that. Then Tony started to sing and every time we told him there was no money in it he used to go anyway. He used to thumb his way down from Mt Gravatt to the Coast every week. He joined the surf lifesaving at Surfers Paradise and got his bronze and the fellows down there kept putting him in talent quests. He eventually won a few and was seen by Ivan Dayman and then he was on his way. (Mrs Worsely).*

Alan Campbell was born in 1942 in Preston England and his family came to Australia in 1949 on the ship S.S. Empire Brent. Their first stop was Sydney and they travelled to Brisbane in 1950. Alan was a young teenager when he first played drums to accompany the 78rpm records his father played for campers to dance to at the Point Lookout Progress Hall during the summer holidays. A guy by the name of Norm Rahnsleben from the area loaned him a

set of old-fashioned 1910/20 drums - big bass drum, little cymbals and a big snare drum. Old-fashioned though they may be, the drums, along with his father's running the holiday dance at Point Lookout, were enough to get Alan started on a part-time career in music that was to see him into retirement almost fifty years later.

Betty McQuade was born in Paisley Scotland in 1941 and migrated to Brisbane with her family in 1948. As was the case for many of the migrant families, life in Australia was generous in some ways, less so in others.

*I lost my Dad when we came out here. We came out here in 48 and Dad died in 51, we only had him for 3 years here. My sister was a trained singer, she had singing lessons and I had dancing lessons and when I went into the heat of the talent quest, my mum was thrilled. My sister would go in for the conservatorium things, you know, and here was me going to rock 'n' roll, to sing rock 'n' roll in a talent quest. I was happy to win the heat but when I won the final - my Mum never came in with me my sister came in and of course Mum was anxiously waiting at home to find out who had won. (Betty McQuade).*

Betty maintained her connection with family in Scotland, especially with an Aunty who was a music teacher. She was often able to send out sheet music of popular songs before it was available in Australia. Betty could read the words of the song from the sheet music but was unable to decipher the notes so her sister, who could sight-read music, was an invaluable aid. As was often the case though, “ ... the sheet music would never be the same as the record” (Betty McQuade).

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Billy Thorpe was born in Manchester, England in 1946 and migrated to Australia and settled in Brisbane in 1955 (McFarlane 1999, p. 635). His first professional gig was at the Railway Hotel in the Brisbane suburb of Woolloongabba at the age of ten where patrons “showered the stage with coins”. He collected “the staggering amount of ten pounds, which was a fortune to a ten-year-old boy, considering the basic wage in those days was about three quid a week.” (Thorpe 1996, p. 2). He attended Salisbury State High School and by the time he went to Sydney in 1963, he had performed at most venues in Brisbane and Queensland.

The Gibb family, including Barry, Robin and Maurice later to become the Bee Gees, arrived in Australia as migrants in 1958, settled in Brisbane and for a time lived in the suburb of Cribb Island. Barry was born in 1946 and twins Robin and Maurice in 1949 and lived much of their childhood in Manchester (McFarlane 1999, p. 50). Their father Hugh was an experienced part time musician and encouraged his boys to develop the harmony style that was to make them famous.

Bob Halliwell (see p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) who used to live at Cribb Island remembers the early days with the Gibb boys.

*What we used to do on Sunday night is sit at the corner store from about six o'clock, it was getting dark in summer time and I can remember Barry Gibb and his brothers coming down. Bill Gates was sort of getting them going at the speedway club and all the rest of it and him and his brothers used to come down and we'd all sit around and sing on Sunday nights at the kiosk corner. I remember one night he got real smart and wasn't*

*gonna sing unless we gave him sixpence. They'd sing a song for sixpence. From then on they were out. We told them they either sang or they wouldn't be going home. So they sang ... But that's what we used to do in the old days and the policeman would come along about half past eight or nine o'clock and say, "Get home and off the street" and you'd have to go. You wouldn't argue with the man. You respected your local police constable and you'd go. We used to sit around and harmonise.*  
(Bob Halliwell).

Tony Troughton was another immigrant from England who was to have a far-reaching influence not only on Brisbane rock 'n' roll but also on the Australian industry. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Tony was born in Lancaster, Lancashire England in 1914 and came to Brisbane in the 'assisted passage program' with his partner Ivy Dimmock and two surviving children a short while after the war.

### Conclusion

Rock 'n' roll was most successfully distributed around the world through the movies and the most famous of the rock 'n' roll movies is *Blackboard Jungle*, a movie which dealt with delinquent behaviour in a school. It featured Bill Haley and the Comets performing *Rock Around the Clock* and was seen in Australian capital cities during 1956. Australian rock 'n' roll was born in January 1957 during a Lee Gordon organized tour of major Australian cities by Bill Haley and the Comets. In Brisbane, Haley performed to 20 000 patrons over two evenings and four concerts. At that time, Brisbane was capital of a state that was ruled by a conservative, rurally biased Labor Party that had been in power for forty years.

Strict censorship laws were in place and moral panic abounded and while television started in the southern states in time for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Brisbane had to wait until 1959 for its turn to be able to see as well as hear what was being broadcast. This did not discourage European migrants from settling in Brisbane and their involvement in and influence on the emerging local and national rock 'n' roll industry seems to be out of proportion to their numbers in the community at large.

The conservatism carried over to the radio stations and the people who ran them. Not only was rock 'n' roll not played on Brisbane stations, it was often discredited by the DJs. It took them some time to come to terms with the commercial possibilities of this new music as well as the growing disposable income of the teenagers who identified with it. Even though there was not the programming pressure applied to radio by the starting of television broadcasting as was the case in southern capitals, by mid 1957 rock 'n' roll was regularly heard on Brisbane radio and was well and truly there to stay and "pay" (Chapple and Garofalo 1977).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Rock 'n' Roll Comes to Brisbane**

#### **Introduction**

The period between the end of the Second World War and the coming of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane was a time of significant and important change for Australia. During the 1950s for example, "Australia's population increased by 25 percent, the number of cars by 100 percent and the debt by 400 percent. Seventy percent of all debt was for cars" (Eshuys, Guest et al. 1996, p. 183). At the same time, while wages doubled the cost of living went up accordingly. On the international scene, Australia grew to recognise the political, economic and cultural importance of its affiliation with the United States through a partnership cemented during the emergencies associated with the War and consummated, partially at least, as a result of the social, cultural and economic changes associated with that period in world history we now refer to as the "Cold War".

Even though rock 'n' roll didn't come to Brisbane until more than ten years after the end of the War, to not discuss the influence American soldiers had in spreading American popular culture in Brisbane is to do the memory of that early phase an injustice. The period leading up to the culturally and socially momentous events of early 1957 led to "practically all of the old art form [being] obliterated from the scene in one foul swoop" (Burke 1983, p. 11). For many,

that "old art form" in the variety of their Friday and Saturday night entertainment was represented by the beauty, order and organisation of pattern dancing done to sedate, traditional, big band music in ornate buildings like City Hall and Cloudland. Its obliteration via a process that started during the war and gained momentum during the mid 1950s, was viewed as a challenge to much of what that "old art form" represented. In the following pages, the challenge will be examined from three perspectives, first from that of the dancers and their dances, second from that of the pictures and the radio and third from the perspective of the musicians and their music.

### **The Dances and the Dancers**

Dancing was clearly an important past time for many during the interlude mentioned above and the activities of the dancers and in particular the dances that they conducted or attended will concern us for the first section of this chapter. Palais or ballroom dancing was a "civilised method of achieving physical contact with the opposite sex [that] allowed liberties which would normally earn incarceration for aggravated assault" (Burke 1983, p. 10). Dance patrons of the time were participants in an ongoing conflict between the traditional Palais and more modern and exhibitionist jiving and jitterbugging that came to Brisbane via the "talkies" and the American servicemen, a conflict which continued well past the coming of rock 'n' roll (Burke 1983, p. 10). According to Burke, dance promoters discouraged jiving and jitterbugging, and no doubt rock 'n' roll when it came, because it took up too much space. As a bandleader, he was often told not to "play that kind of music around here"

(Burke 1983, p. 10) on the threat of losing a regular job. As will be discussed, this did not always meet with the approval of some of the patrons.

The emergencies associated with the war period saw Australia, and Brisbane in particular, become a staging post for a large number of the American and Australian servicemen involved in the hostilities in the Pacific. As a large country town and capital city of a rurally biased state, Brisbane, with a population of about 340 000 people (Campbell 1989, p. 46) lacked the sophisticated entertainment that many of the American visitors were used to. The contrast, for instance, between the desire by many locals to maintain the respectful observance of Sundays and the obvious need to ensure entertainment for American troops with little to occupy their minds, provides a good example of the major dilemma that the need for leisure time activities created for Brisbane and Australian authorities.

While "high tea and community singing after church" (Campbell 1989, p. 178) may have been considered sufficient by many locals to satisfy the Australian troops, such homely activities failed to gratify the needs of the American visitors. One American serviceman is reported to have observed, "Brisbane on a Sunday reminds me of a New York cemetery except that it's only half as big and twice as dead" (Campbell 1989, p. 178). Despite challenges from various quarters, including the Council of Churches, a conference planned to resolve what became a difficult situation was held in April 1942. As a result of submissions from a range of interested parties, including the Prime Minister, a recommendation was adopted that Sunday entertainment be provided for the

troops and their partners for the duration. Locals, however, were to be excluded from venues offering such frivolous distractions.

Much effort was made to ensure that the visiting soldiers would feel as much at home as possible and this effort included ensuring that the leisure activities they were used to were made available in the cities they were visiting. In Brisbane, dance venues such as Cloudland and the City Hall were soon swinging to American bands playing the latest in so called vulgar, cheap jazz music and Australian girls joining the GIs in styles of dance such as the jitterbug which would have been frowned on a couple of years earlier. As one attendee at a Brisbane City Hall dance during the war reported:

*The band was good. Yankee and very hot. I remember how Queensland danced a little while ago: Waltzes, two steps, the Pride of Erin and all those Victorian affairs.*

*Now they jitterbug at terrific speed. ...kicking, belly-wobbling, bum-popping, tapping, whirling insanely like people possessed by devils (cited in Sturma 1992, p. 130).*

A direct result of the adoption of this recommendation was the influx of American artists and bands imported to perform at the many nightclubs and dance venues as they sprang up around the city. And with the musicians and music came the dancers and dances. According to Campbell (1989, p. 182):

*[t]he American presence caused an entertainment boom in Brisbane. Big American dance bands ... helped further the ever increasing appeal of American popular culture for young Australians ... The Americans brought with them their jazz and their jitterbug, shattering the formerly sedate pace of Brisbane dancing.*

Not only was there an interest in the entertainment boom. One of the great concerns for Brisbane's men was the fact that all these changes, especially those associated with the courting habits of their womenfolk, were being promoted and adopted in their absence:

*... a lot of the rock 'n' roll started with the Yankee servicemen coming out here and our blokes were overseas so they were virtually teaching the women of Australia rock 'n' roll (sic) ... Our fellows came back and gradually the women introduced it to the fellows (Les Luck 3.0).*

To many, the American servicemen were over paid, over sexed and perhaps worst of all, over here. Aileen McCourt (see p. 315) as a young girl remembers them teaching the local women how to boogie and jitterbug. For Pam French (see p. 311), dancing with American sailors was very important in her growing up, "They taught me a lot." It wasn't rock 'n' roll though, first it was boogie-woogie and then it was the jitterbug. Shirley Cronau (see p.310), even though she was very young at the time, still remembers the name of the American serviceman her divorced mother was going out with during the war.

The jitterbug and its variants took over the dancing venues of Brisbane for the extent of the war and it was this influx onto the local scene that fertilized the soil in which the social, cultural, economic and musical changes of the 1950s could take root and grow. Consider, for example, the experiences of John and Aileen McCourt.

John and Aileen began teaching the jitterbug to the young people in the Brisbane suburb in which they resided, Mt Gravatt, in the early to mid 1950s, a teaching tradition which they carried on well into the rock 'n' roll era. But their jitterbug pedigrees go back to World War 2 and to American soldiers in very different parts of that war in very different parts of the world. Aileen was born in Hughenden in 1931 and was introduced to the jitterbug in 1942 in South Australia by American soldiers.

*When I was a little girl and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, my mother, my 2 brothers and myself were evacuated to Adelaide and they put us in a little town outside Adelaide called Bridgewater. When the American soldiers came through ... we had soldiers billeted in the town. They had nothing to do because it was a pretty dead old place, and so the ladies of the town decided that they would hold some dances. Of course we couldn't do the dances that they wanted to do which was basically boogie and jitterbug so the soldiers said that they would teach everyone to jitterbug. Anyone who wanted to learn could go down on Sunday afternoon and have lessons and we would have the dances that night. So we traveled down to the church hall.*

*The ladies and the gentlemen of the town were allowed in and the soldiers were allowed in but there were two lots of people who weren't allowed in, that was the kids, that's us, and the blacks. Unfortunately there weren't too many black servicemen with the Americans at this time but we were lucky, we had 2 black men with a red headed sergeant whose name was Buddy, I know that. So the black men weren't allowed in and the kids weren't allowed in and so the red headed fellow said, "Well I'm not going in" so we stayed out on the veranda and watched ...*

*The American soldiers were the ones that bought that ban in so here we were stuck out with a couple of trucks, a veranda, a red headed soldier and two African Americans as they call them now. We were watching the dancing and trying to do all the dances and the red headed fellow said "Well I can do better than that" and he and these 2 black men decided to teach us kids the jitterbug. We learned more in 15 minutes with them than the ladies inside with the white dancers (Aileen McCourt 3.0).*

John McCourt (see p. 316) on the other hand was born in Lisburn in Northern Ireland in 1929 and was introduced to the jitterbug while attending American dances as chaperone to his older sisters.

*Yes well we all awoke up one morning in Ireland in 1942 in this little country town where we lived and heard all this racket. We looked out the windows of our little old homes, there were tanks, aeroplanes, thousands of soldiers marching up the street all heading out towards Knockmore which is about 3 or 4 mile further out in the country. They put down tents first. The next week they had big hangers, you couldn't imagine the things that went on. If they wanted anything they took it. The war was on. They were fighting the war. They build monstrous places out there and after school we'd watch what was going on and we got to know some of the soldiers, we were about 13 then. We were sometimes invited inside for Coca Cola and soda crackers, lollies you name it, in big kerosene tins of the stuff. We'd only seen lollies in a glass jar on the local shop shelf. But here they'd just open these big tins and pour them out on the table. You'd never seen so many lollies in your life, even before the yanks came, lollies and all were restricted and of course you never had much money...*

*Anyway, then, my sisters were 2 beautiful girls and we had our own little dance hall like the Orange Hall and the Catholic Hall at the other end of town, things like that. They were all taken down to the Plaza Ballroom in*

*Belfast. This is where I first saw Glenn Miller in the flesh. That's where the dances were. So Mum would say to my sisters Mary and Sarah, "I don't like letting you girls go dancing. Your two older brothers in the navy and the air force and they're at war and it is a little bit dicey letting you go down there. So you'd better have a chaperone." And the girls were thinking who are we gonna get to chaperone? All the lads are away at the war. "What about John?" Mum said, "I don't think he could do much in an emergency but he's better than nothing." So away I would go to the dances at the big Plaza. The sisters would be dancing with the Americans and there would probably be 15 or 20 Americans waiting to have a dance with them as women were scarce in those days. So while I was standing there and the girls were dancing with some of the American soldiers, the other soldiers that were sitting around me would say "Lets practice these steps." And that's how I was introduced to jive and boogie* (John McCourt **3.0**).

So it was not only in Brisbane that the cultural exports and exploits of American soldiers took the minds of the locals off the pre-war interest in what was considered to be their traditional cultural pursuits. The similarities were clearly no respecters of national or international borders. "When John came to Australia and I met him in 1952, we got on the floor together and it was just like we'd had the same teacher (Aileen McCourt).

The end of the war saw Brisbane return to what some would consider being some kind of normality. But the memories of the good times remained and still remain. Shirley Cronau was born in 1939 and lived with her grandparents who had a shop in the suburb of New Farm. She can remember

American service people, many of whom were camped at New Farm down near the Brisbane River, coming into the shop to buy things.

With an end to the emergencies, there was little room for the luxury associated with these memories in the minds and actions of those charged with returning Brisbane to its pre-war normality. Nor was there room for the excesses associated with the war and American popular culture. “In Brisbane it was like they were going to start a new society and everyone was going to have their place in that society and it would be very restrictive” (*Aileen McCourt*). But for the dancers who had gotten used to the freedom associated with the American presence, that which remained was abnormal. The ballroom dancers wanted their halls back and saw no reason initially to provide for the jivers. For those interested in the newer styles of dancing and entertainment, the leaving of the Americans equated to the switching off of a light in their lives. For the traditionalists, the excesses of the wartime era had to be nipped in the bud. Jivers, for instance, at Cloudland were initially put out of the hall (*Aileen McCourt 3.1*).

One of the problems for jivers was that fact that ballroom dancing is what Les Luck (see p. 314) refers to as “pattern dancing” and the “freedom” associated with the newer forms was seen as more rebellious. It was not to be all gloom and doom for the jivers however. The Brisbane Jive Club was taken over by Jack Busteed just before the end of the 1940s and it was here that he developed a kind of jive that was approved by the ballroom dancers.

*So they formed a new type of jive which was very strong on footwork, tremendous footwork, very close, they were people who could brag that they could dance on a square yard and not have any overlap in that square yard. (Aileen McCourt).*

With an interest in new dance forms that was obviously growing, dance promoters could not ignore jivers. As a result of their sheer numbers (and the attendant entry fee), areas of halls were roped off for the jivers. In Cloudland they were given about 6 feet (2 metres) at one end of the hall in the early days. For members of the Jack Busteads club, "like all dances, we had a special place to dance in the hall. That of course was in the corner near the stage at City Hall" (Shirley Lawrence letter).

Cloudland was closely identified with the Americans, being officially opened in 1940. It was designed to be part of Brisbane's answer to Sydney's Lunar Park. "\$130 000 had been invested in the enterprise to provide the best ballroom in the Southern Hemisphere ... designed to give pleasure to the residents of Queensland, particularly those of Brisbane" (Hogan 1982, p. 111).

*With its myriad twinkling lights beckoning from the heights of Bowen Hills, Cloudland, Luna Park's ballroom, attracted hundreds to the official opening by the Vice-mayor (Ald. A. H. Tait) last night. The dance program began shortly after 8.30 ...and soon 100 couples were dancing to the music of Billy Romaine's Orchestra, and hundreds more watched from the alcoves and the galleries (Courier Mail 02/08/40).*

In addition to the ballroom, the original plan called for an area of about 2.5ha on one of the highest points in Brisbane to be converted to an out door amusement park. Although most of the "Luna Park-like" features were never built, the

complex did have one unique attraction. Its alpine railway was designed to transport patrons up the steep hillside to the attractions above from the trams on the streets below. The railway did not survive as long as Cloudland, having been damaged in a mini-tornado (Burke 1983, p. 51).

During the war, Cloudland was leased by the Americans and when they came in, "so did the termites" (Burke 1983, p. 53). One of the most notable features of Cloudland, as far as dancers are concerned was the sprung floor. According to Burke, this floor was added in 1955 when Cloudland "was patched up and a new floor was constructed which was capable of bouncing up and down like a waterbed" (Burke 1983, p. 53). As traditional ballroom dancing went the way of many other pre-war cultural pursuits, so the structure, as a centre for dancing, was doomed with the introduction of amplified music. Cloudland and its management were able to adapt for a short period to new expectations but not without some struggle.

Pat Aulton (see page 307) remembers his introduction to Cloudland in the early 1960s.

*Ivan Dayman, who was a promoter and was my employer, and he was a nice bloke. Very straight and very loyal and I was loyal to him and we did Adelaide, we did Melbourne. Melbourne was terrific because we opened Preston and Canterbury. Then Ivan said "We're going to Brisbane." I said "OK. What are we going to do there?" He said, "I think I'll take over Cloudland." So he came up here and we saw Hans Apel who owned Cloudland and he leased it to Ivan. It had an office out the back and huge ballroom which I used to sweep every day apart from*

*work at night and we built the crowd up from 1250 with Bernie Kempster, I must go back to this story because it is a lovely story. We walked into the hall on the first night, Ivan and I just standing there looking at these people, and it was like going back 30 years because they were all ballroom dancing, foxtrot etc. There was a list, a white list at the front, all backlit and it said foxtrot, quickstep, foxtrot. It was all in a little box and it was right in front of Bernie Kempster who was the piano player of 16-piece orchestra and Bernie had the job of replacing these sleeves. The next might be a polka etc. The end result was we kept looking at Bernie and I said to Ivan "He hasn't got his teeth in." I looked at the charts and they were 1932 Jimmy Lally arrangements. It was a time warp. It was just out of control. I just couldn't believe it because having come through all the rock 'n' roll system, we walked into this place and said "Ivan, we need a good broom here." Ivan had spotted it and as observant as he was, we just walked in and did it. It was wonderful (Pat Aulton **3.0**).*

For some time into the 1950s, the ballroom dancers had their way with regards to discouraging the jivers. Carol Shepherd remembers starting to go to dances in 1952. She was about 15 years old and ballroom dancing was still in vogue. Cloudland was the place to be, but the Riverside Ballroom in Oxlade Drive New Farm still figures prominently in her memory. Both venues had areas roped off for people who wanted to do boogie-woogie. The place to be on Friday night was Jack Busteed's in the Valley, a triangular building behind the Wallace-Bishop workshops. Recorded rather than live music was provided at that venue. As a self-confessed nonconformist she would have been considered by some to be a widgie. T-shirts, tight skirts and high-heeled shoes

were the go for girls at Jack Busteed's, but Carol often took her flatties to dance in (Carol Shepherd **3.0**).

According to a letter supplied by Pam French (Carol's sister) and written by Shirley Lawrence, Jack Busteed's Jive Club began in 1948 as the first jive club to be opened in Brisbane after the war. At that time, it operated from a building in Post Office Square, Adelaide Street.

*We all looked forward to the Saturday afternoons at the Jive Club ... We also had dances on Sunday nights at the club for a get together which we all enjoyed ... Like all dancers, we had a special place to dance in the hall. That of course was in the corners near the stage at the City Hall. That is where you would find most of the Jack Busteed's Jive Club. After the dances closed at City Hall, we made our new home at Cloudland Ballroom. We danced to Billo Smith Dance Band and enjoyed every minute of it (Shirley Lawrence).*

Meetings of the club in the form of lessons and dances were held on Saturday afternoons and Sunday evenings. It operated from premises in Adelaide Street until about 1952 and from St Francis House in Elizabeth Street till 1954. It then moved to Wrightsons' Dancing Studio in Fortitude Valley. The letter explained the exploits of one group of dancers in breaking the twenty-four hours record. The couples "danced down the hall-way to a truck. The truck took them to the City Hall. Their (sic) they danced off the truck into the dance floor where they finished off the record breaking hours which was a memorable night." It seems that the Busteed's organisation has survived well the test of time, with reunions occurring up to the present.

In Shirley Cronau's time, there were definite groups of people who attended Jack Busteed's, a relatively small venue to which between fifty and eighty people could attend. Friday night was Busteed's night. The bodgies and widgies used to sit on one side of the room separated from a group who used to regularly travel down from Ipswich. In another corner were the people from Chermside and last and least, the nerds who used to sit down the end near the toilet. The groups tended not to intermix and in most cases, the good dancers commanded most respect within their group. To be asked to dance, for instance, by Ken Byers was the high point of the night for the girls in Shirley's group (Shirley Cronau **3.1**).

Dress seems to have been an important distinguishing factor for these groups at this time. For instance, despite the negative public perception of all bodgies, according to Shirley, there were 'good' bodgies and 'bad'. The 'good' bodgies were distinctive as good dressers where as the 'bad' bodgies paid little attention to their dress. And some of the 'bad' bodgies were bad. Names such as John Stuart, Billy Phillip and Ducky O'Connor, each of whom went on to be associated with the criminal scene in various parts of Australia, were included in this category of names she could remember (Shirley Cronau **3.2**).

According to Angelo Macaudo (see p. 314), to be in the 'in' crowd, you had to be 'sharp' and being 'sharp' meant dressing well. Near the Rex Theatre in the Valley was a men's wear store owned by Chris Leon and it was to Chris that many of Brisbane's 'sharp' dressers went to have their outrageous apparel

tailor-made. And it seemed that the more outrageous it was the better with curtain material a favourite. Other favourites were bright yellow or pink while yet others were made out of black material criss-crossed with a shiny thread to make it look like a spider web. The male dress trend paralleled that from Sydney where the favourite men's outfitter was Andy Ellis, referred to as the "Dior of the drape shape" by a journalist in the *Weekend* newspaper of August 1957 (cited in Cockington, 2001, p. 17). Angelo referred to the Sydney trend as being promoted by the 'Duke's Club'

For Des Wallace, the purchase of clothes required a fair percentage of his weekly pay packet. Saturday night going out gear included a french poplin stripped ivy league style shirt with a button down collar, a pair of tailor made trousers and a drape coat. The coat was full with broad shoulders and padded chest with one button "strategically placed between your navel and your best friend". It would have been about three inches longer than a traditional sports coat while the pants would have had twenty-six inch knees, two inch reverse pleats and fourteen inch bottoms (Des Wallace **3.1**).

Not only did the clothes make the man, so did the hair. It drew the attention, not only of friends, but also the not so friendly. According to Des, more than one young man standing on the Black Cat corner in Queen Street on a Saturday morning was given a whack on the back of the head by a policeman and told to get a haircut. It was even reported that the Bodgie Squad would take some of the so-called bodgies from the T&G corner back to the CIB and give them a severe talking to as well as a "free" haircut. Des Wallace recounts that

he was only saved from such a fate by the fact that he actually cut the hair of some of the detectives.

Angelo Macaudo first started going to an Italian barber in the Valley but ended up taking his trade, as did many other Brisbanites, to Col Naylor's establishment in the city. Col had opened his shop in Albert Street in 1952 and it became **the** men's hairdressing shop in Queensland. Such success depended on Col and his staff keeping up to date with the latest in hairdressing trends, especially from magazines and movies. Companies like Brylcreme and Vaseline Hair Tonic used to produce hairstyle books that defined a range of haircuts, many of which were named after a movie star or successful sports person, Cornell Wilde and Tony Curtis among the more popular. Des Wallace, who started in the shop as a teenage apprentice hairdresser described Col and his employee Ted Brown as artists:

*... hairdressers who did any style you like from the shortest to the fullest to the most bodgie to the most sedate, all scissor and comb and razor. These were artists, they weren't just guys that could run a pair of clippers over a guy's head, they were artists (Des Wallace **3.0**).*

Music at Cloudland for much of the 1950s was supplied by Billo Smith's band. According to a report and photo in *The Courier Mail* (25/01/57, p. 6) Billo Smith had been the conductor of the Cloudland orchestra for ten years when he retired from the job on the previous day. The photo depicted Mr Smith handing over the baton to Frank Thornton, described in the article as an American

saxophonist<sup>1</sup>. Mr Smith did not favour the new styles of music and dancing. According to the McCourts, "old Billo Smith wasn't greatly in love with us" but he did very well financially from his time at Cloudland since "his wife was on piano, he was the band leader and his son played sax".

Jivers in almost all of their forms eventually became tolerated at the established venues in and around Brisbane and it seemed that the rope proved to be a short-term solution that allowed the ballroom dancers and the jivers to co-exist. While it allowed the jivers to do their thing without interfering with the traditionalists, it also allowed the jivers to join in the traditional dances when they wished, a winning situation for all concerned. Les Luck suggested that it allowed for the jivers to be tolerated (Les Luck 3.2). Tolerate is probably the operative word for the McCourts. John and Aileen responded in October 2000 as follows to Les' memories:

*We think that Les may be remembering another era here or has watched too many episodes of "Happy Days". The 1950's society was quite oppressive. To dance in a café was asking to be thrown out on one's ear. Rock 'n' Roll dance is actually basic jive (jitterbug) danced to R 'n' R music. There are distinct rhythm patterns. Its much easier to perform and much more fun if you learn these patterns and easier to get a good dance partner. " ... no pattern, no partner" quote Daphne Glover, Mt Gravatt dance club.*

John and Aileen along with some of their friends one night noticed at Cloudland that there was more room on the tables to dance than what had been allocated to the jivers in the back corner.

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<sup>1</sup> Thornton had been advertised as a headline act for the November 21 1956 Rock 'n' Roll Festival at the Stadium.

*AM So one night they were playing some rock 'n' roll music and John decided we didn't have enough room.*

*JM They kept sending us down to the corner and the only thing I could see with any room on it was a big 8 foot diameter table so we jumped up on that and were dancing.*

*AM And then everybody followed us and we thought the police again for sure. So, the band stopped, and there must have been a dozen couples on different tables dancing, and putting on a bloody good show if I might say so, the ballroom dancers stopped to watch. Eventually we got off and went home and we thought that if the management finds out about this, we may not be allowed back. But we sort of made an agreement that for one night a week, the whole floor would be given to jive (Aileen McCourt **3.2**).*

## **The Pictures and the Radio**

At this time in Australia's history, what we now refer to as the movies was generally referred to as "the pictures". It has been stated that, as in many other parts of the world, American popular culture was most successfully distributed via the pictures, possibly the original and most "multi" of the "multi media". As a means of entertainment, the movies were both affordable and attainable for teenagers and more importantly something many Brisbane teenagers could do without too much interference from their parents, at least once they got to the theatre. Many attended the movies at least once a week. In discussing how she met her future husband, Jan Kerwin (see p. 313) explains:

*A lot of people met at the movies I think. That was virtually how we met - Saturday night at the movies. We sort of knew the other people that we*

*each went around with but we didn't know each other. We actually met at the movies. Not many people had the telephone on in those days. It was more or less like we would go out on the Saturday night to the movies and then just say "I'll see you next Saturday night." Sometimes Doug used to come down. He lived at Cooparoo, which was a couple of suburbs away from me, and he didn't have a car. Sometimes his brother would lend him his but sometimes he'd ride his pushbike over after football training or something like that. We would probably talk for a couple of hours and then he would say "See you Saturday night" or "I'll come and pick you up Saturday night to go to the movies." He would come down in the tram or ride his bike and we would go back on the tram*

**(Jan Kerwin 3.0).**

As a means of making teenagers in Brisbane aware of rock 'n' roll, the movies were initially much more influential than was radio. It has been mentioned earlier that Brisbane radio stations, like most mainstream stations in the western world, did not play rock 'n' roll. Their target audience had been adults and according to *Rogers and O'Brien (1975, p.2)*:

*[c]ommercial radio, the omnipotent home entertainment of the time, arrogantly broadcast to a single target audience and behaved as if everyone had the same [adult] taste in entertainment.*

This was a time when "the controlling hand on the dial was almost inviolably adult and when middle-age meant incontestable authority, if not always wisdom" (Rogers and O'Brien 1975, p. 2). Teenagers had little influence over what was listened to. For Jan Kerwin, the radio was a furniture piece that was controlled by the adults of her house.

*...[W]hen Dad was at work, my sister and I were really able to coax Mum around to having the more modern station on at the time which I think would have been 4BH, the most modern one of the day, with Bill Gates. Bob Rogers was also 4BH and they played all the really up to date music. But when Dad came in, we could tell by the look on his face that he didn't want that sort of music to be on so it was put on to things that he would want to listen to. And then when we got a radiogram, it was a piece of furniture too, it was all in one. My sister and I didn't have a lot of money to buy records with but we would buy people like Little Richard and Elvis Presley. We would have to wait until Dad was downstairs mowing or not home to put these records on otherwise there would have been a lot of fuss made (Jan Kerwin 3.1).*

For her husband Doug (see p. 313), the radio situation was similar.

*Yes it was a centrepiece of the entertainment in the home. It was the only thing that you had. That's why they made them like they were, pieces of furniture. ... [W]e had our music playing but Dad wasn't home much during the week, he was always at work, poor bugger ... He used to walk in on a Saturday, which was basically the only time we'd see him. He'd get home at 9 o'clock at night, been working overtime, and he worked hard for us. There were 6 of us. Then he'd walk in of a Saturday afternoon after being at work. You'd be listening to the music and he would just walk in and flick the station and listen to his horse racing. And to this day, I cannot stand horse racing. That's something that happened in my life. But that's what he used to do and it used to make me boil. But, like I say, I understand him now because that was his time. But radio was definitely a major piece of entertainment in those times. There was no TV (Doug Kerwin 3.0).*

Des Wallace remembers his father, a relatively 'square' person, bringing home a magnificent radiogram that included a Jerry Lee Lewis recording. In the Wallace family situation, the father controlled what was played on the radiogram. It was to Des's great satisfaction that his father, although he didn't like to admit to it, could be greatly influenced by his children (Des Wallace **3.2**).

But not everybody's parents controlled the radio dial. The radio in Shirley Cronau's house was on all day and tuned to station 4BH, a station that played all the latest records. Even though her grandmother didn't think much of the music that was played on that station, Shirley was allowed to switch the radio on in the morning and have it stay on all day (Shirley Cronau **3.3**). Angelo Macaudo's family started off with a wind-up record played and graduated to a radiogram. Angelo and his sisters use to play records on this machine and dance to them. Initially their father was interested in classical music and wouldn't let the children play their records but he relented as time wore on until they used it more than he did (Angelo Macaudo **3.0**).

While parents had some control over their children in the house, what happened after leaving the house was much more a matter of trust.

*I think I did end up sneaking to Rock Around the Clock, the movie. I saw it at the Alhambra Picture Theatre at Stones Corner which was absolutely banned. You were not to go near the Alhambra because that's where all those terrible motorbike boys hung out ...That was a big no-no. I think that night I told my mother a lie and told her I had gone to see something else at the Roxy at Cooparoo. But I had gone to the Alhambra*

*and I kept on thinking I hope I don't get bashed up by a bikie tonight, how will I explain to Mum (Jan Kerwin 3.2).*

For the McCourts, the pictures were their way of learning new moves to teach their eager students. In the early days of rock 'n' roll, dancers were not sure whether they were doing the right moves or not "[s]o when *Jukebox Rhythm* came out, that was one of the first movies that came out, we went to see that. We weren't terribly impressed with it but you could see the dancers in that trying it on" (Aileen McCourt). The movie *Rock Around the Clock* was a different matter though:

*[W]e saw [Rock Around the Clock] at Camp Hill. There was a fellow who had a little theatre over at Camp Hill, the old Barn we called it, and he took all the front seats out, they were those deck chair seats. He wasn't going to have a riot in his theatre; he was going to let us in. He let us in all afternoon and we watched that movie over and over again. And the strange thing about it is that we got it right. We had got it right (Aileen McCourt)*

*Everyone watching it would see something different. And then back at the club, someone would say, now what about this step. And we learned a whole routine from that movie, hours and hours of movie watching and that was rock 'n' roll (John McCourt).*

*And then when *Don't Knock the Rock* came out of course, it was no problem at all. We were involved in a bit of an altercation. A lot of these so called riots. There were often only about 6 couples involved. We went to the Tivoli Roof Garden Theatre that was in Albert Street and you had to go either up a lift or up these long narrow stairs... (Aileen McCourt).*

Bob Halliwell went to the Tivoli to see *Rock Around the Clock* with three of his mates.

*...I can remember that when I went and saw Rock Around the Clock, I nearly jumped out of my seat when this music started playing. I thought "Wow. This is really something." This was at the Tivoli and there was 2 mates and myself who used to go around all the time, known as the Three Musketeers and this mate of mine, Peter May who just totally loved Bill Haley and the Comets. I can remember the usherette hitting him on the head with a torch and telling him to shut up. He didn't even hear her, didn't feel it. He was just completely out of it watching the screen and listening to the music. So that's the sort of effect it had on people in those days. It was really wild. (Bob Halliwell 3.0).*

*The Courier Mail's* film critic P. D. Spooner didn't demonstrate any excitement about *Don't Knock the Rock*. He suggested, tongue in cheek, in his column *A Look at the Films with P. D. Spooner*,

*[F]ellow delinquents, we have been misled. This rock 'n' roll business is not the social menace it's cracked up to be ... The message behind the title is a passionate plea to the squares not to say derogative things about the new sensation ... rock 'n' roll is whitewashed, innocuous as a Boy Scouts' rally.*

He finishes his critique a little less tongue in cheek though:

*In between all this morality, we were subjected to some moronic dialogue, quivering dancing, and monotonous rhythm (Courier Mail 09/02/57, p. 7).*

P. D. Spooner did not enjoy the movie "Rock, Rock, Rock" either. In talking about Tuesday Weld, he suggests that:

*Her acting, deportment and attempts at dubbing song lyrics were like last Thursday's hash. Rock, Rock, Rock is just a cheap quickie, and if Hollywood hopes to exploit rock 'n' roll on the screen it will have to do a lot better (Courier Mail 10/01/57, p. 3).*

Pictures were one means of spreading the word about rock 'n' roll but there is nothing like a person with first hand and up to date experience. In mid 1950s Brisbane, this was most likely to be available from the sailors on board visiting American naval and cargo ships. The sailors were not only a source of practical experience, they were also able to provide the recordings that were so sought after but were unavailable in the local shops.

*JM We got that from the American sailors.*

*AM No we got that from the ships.*

*JM [They were at] Hamilton Wharf. We'd invite them to dances and things when the ships were in. You'd print out little notices and stick them on the wharves ... we were just looking to get records to dance to. You couldn't buy them here of course.*

*AM And they did come and teach us new movements and new steps. And in 1955 of course we started getting the records. We got Chuck Berry and we got Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard ... [The music stores] started to stock them. They were the little 45s. (John McCourt 3.2)*

The visiting Americans were an important influence in Pam French's dancing life:

*In the early 50, the American sailors started coming over in the destroyers and I found that I jived with a lot of Americans who had a different style as well. And I think it has a lot to do with my style today. Even though the men set the pattern for dancing, I think the style that I have is to do with that I got a good round education in it (Pam French 3.0).*

The name of Dulcie Day is one that is closely associated with the introduction of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane. She was born in 1914 and was heavily involved in the Brisbane dance scene, before, during and after the war. In talking about his late wife, Tom Day explained that she had a family tradition of dancing and dance teaching, her father being the manager of the Trocadero. "Everywhere there was anything to do with dancing, my wife was in it up to her eyebrows" (Tom Day 3.0).

The fact that Dulcie was into dancing "up to her eyebrows" in the mid 1950s meant that she was heavily interested in the effect this new rock 'n' roll was having on the dancing scene in Brisbane. The way in which she got involved in promoting rock 'n' roll dances, which she initially referred to as jivedances, is an interesting story and one which provides a fascinating link between the dances and their dancers and the musicians and their music.

### **The Music and the Musicians**

Rock 'n' roll came to this country and Brisbane at a time when Australians, still struggling to "re-establish an image of rectitude and sobriety - of nuclear family values, clean-living and decent British restraint rather than

questionable American excess" (Evans 1997), were somewhat shocked by the most influential of the "juvenile delinquent" movies that was to cement, in the minds of many in Brisbane, the association between rebellious teenagers and rock 'n' roll. *Black Board Jungle*, the movie that is probably most responsible for this cementing process, did not get to Australian audiences without gaining the attention of the censor. When it was "first submitted to the Commonwealth Censor by its Australian distributors late in 1954, it was totally rejected for exhibition" (Rogers and O'Brien 1975, p. 8). Following an appeal, it was allowed to be shown after the censor "scissored out 165 feet of its more 'violent' footage" (Rogers and O'Brien 1975, p. 3). It had as its opening theme *Rock Around the Clock*.

Keith Cronau, a Brisbane teenager in the fifties reported to Evans (1997, p.107) that:

*...his first exposure to rock 'n' roll [was] in late 1955 at the Metro Theatre in Albert Street. A 'Sneak Hollywood Preview' of an unnamed movie turned out to be Blackboard Jungle and as the clangorous strains of 'Rock Around the Clock' exploded upon its opening soundtrack, the cinema erupted with a delighted roar, as couples leapt chaotically from their seats to jive in the aisles.*

Another of Evans' informants, a self-proclaimed bogie remembers:

*... attending screenings of 'Blackboard Jungle' in Brisbane more than a dozen times, principally to hear Haley's amplified anthem played behind the credits. During one session, as he bopped about in his seat to the music, he was cuffed sharply across the back of the head by an irate male sitting behind him and ordered to sit still, be quiet and behave himself (p. 107)*

In talking about their visit to the Tivoli to see *Rock Around the Clock*, John and Aileen McCourt remember some excitement with the theatre management and the police. As a result of about six couples dancing in the aisles during the opening credits, the police were called. The dancers were manhandled down the narrow steps leading up to the theatre by the police, only to make their way back up into the theatre. It was an endless task for the police who took them down stairs, left them and went and got another lot (John McCourt **3.3**)

Brisbane theatre managers expressed concern regarding the behaviour of some of their patrons, especially the bodgie/widgie element. In a *Courier Mail* article on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1957, it was reported, "Brisbane theatre managers had started a get-tough campaign against troublemaking bodgies and widgies" (p. 3). Carol Shepherd remembers going to the Tivoli to see *Rock Around the Clock*.

*I went to the Tivoli to see this movie and we got into trouble there because we got up and danced in the aisle. They came along and said "You've got to sit down" so we sat down till they went around the corner and then we were up again. As I said, we couldn't do as we were told ... we weren't thrown out. There was too many to throw out. They'd have no one left in the theatre. But they tried to put a bit of order to it. But as I said, in those days, if you heard dance music, you just got up and danced* (Carol Shepherd **3.1**).

*We went to the Tivoli and saw Rock Around the Clock and you danced in the isles and the ushers would come down and tell you to sit down or they'd throw you out. As soon as they'd gone, you'd get back up again, because you just couldn't sit. I mean to this day, I cannot sit and listen to*

*music. I've got to get up and dance or get my feet going or something. And for us it was just so glamorised (Pam French 3.1).*

Darryl Wright (see p. 321) doesn't remember any dancing in the aisles when he went to see *Rock Around the Clock*. For him, it was a time when Brisbane was considered to be "a big old country town" and it wasn't difficult for people to associate the rock 'n' roll music being played on jukeboxes in milk bars with members of the motor cycle gangs which frequented the venues, given the stimulus provided by movies such as *The Wild One* and *Backboard Jungle*. People such as Neil (Possum) Bossum (who lived in the near city suburb of Windsor and who died later in prison) were bodgies who had associations with motorcycle gangs from Annerley and other suburbs, associations that provided the fuel for Brisbane's moral panic (Darryl Wright 3.0).

With the unstable nature of Queensland politics at this time, and an election looming, bodgies, widgies and rock 'n' roll made good press. The police and the press took advantage of the insecurity many members of the public felt as a result of the recent changes. "Police Blitz City Youths" was the headline on page 1 of *The Courier Mail* (13/05/56)

*Brisbane Consorting Squad detectives early last night broke up a group of young men near the General Post Office steps. Detectives headed by the Consorting Squad Chief (Detective Sergeant L. Wex) questioned a number of the youths. A "loitering prohibited" sign is bolted near the top of the Post Office steps. Detectives took the names, ages, addresses and occupations of several of the youth. The surprise questioning between 5.15 and 6 p.m. started soon after a police car pulled up near the G.P.O. main entrance. One of the young men questioned was carrying a brief case and was wearing green velvet corduroy trousers. Several youths hurriedly left the spot after being questioned by the detectives.*

**Part of drive**

*The raid is part of a police drive to break up gatherings of young men and girls at the public places in the city after working hours during the week. Criminal Investigation Branch chief (Inspector Bischof) said last night that the group questioned near the G.P.O. and at other points in the inner city area, were not regarded as "bodgies" and "Widgies" "We have decided that they should be kept moving and not be gathering in large groups in the streets."*

**A warning**

*Inspector Bischof said that detectives had also warned young people who had been annoying passengers in suburban trains. He said detectives and policewomen traveling on trains had cautioned them, following complaints about boisterous conduct. "But now police will now take firmer action." "I warn any youths who keep this up that they will find themselves before the court" Inspector Bischof said. He said most complaints had come from passengers on trains to and from Ferny Grove.*

Ipswich police received even stronger press some months later. "Firm Stand Taken by Ipswich Police" was the headline on page 3 of *The Courier Mail* (17/07/57).

*IPSWICH - "Any incidents of vandalism by the bodgie element will be strongly dealt with here," the officer in charge of the Ipswich police district (Inspector C. D. Sullivan) said yesterday. "All Ipswich police officers have been alerted to watch the conduct of these youths," he continued. "We are determined to take a firm stand against any acts of larrikinism." He said that following reports of bodgie activity in Brisbane recently, he checked at all railway stations between Ipswich and Gailes, but no complaints had been lodged. "The bodgie 'cult' is not particularly active here, but we are keeping a close watch for any untoward behaviour" he said. Inspector Sullivan added that the deadly game of "chicken" practised by bodgie groups in other states was started on a minor scale in Ipswich some weeks ago, but since police intervention, the activity had stopped. In Toowoomba yesterday, the police chief (Inspector T. Burns) said police had warned away gangs of bodgies who had congregated in Ruthven Street on Sunday afternoon. Further action would be taken to stamp out their hooliganism.*

Even reporting from the Annual Exhibition was not immune from the influence of bodgies. Following the headline "Prize Fowl hit by bodgies", the article reported:

*Poultry men said yesterday that bodgies were endangering prize poultry exhibits at the Brisbane Show. Attendants in the poultry section have declared war on the bodgies. Yesterday they took up positions at vantage points in the Poultry Pavilion to watch for bodgies. This followed raids by bodgies on cages occupied by some prize poultry exhibits ... (Courier Mail 14/08/57 p. 8)*

Some of the young residents of the new suburb of Grovely (on the Ferny Grove railway line) received their fair share of attention from the police and the press. It seemed that, since there was little for them to do in the new suburb, the so-called bodgie and widgie element was reported to be "entertaining" themselves at others' expense. In an article headed *Why Grovely Breeds Bodgies - Nothing Else To Do* (Courier Mail 16/07/57 p. 2) the writer suggests that the City Council is partly to blame for not including leisure facilities in the new suburb of Grovely. Many of the homes in the new suburb were housing commission owned so *The Courier Mail* thought it reasonable to ask "Can bodgies who become a public nuisance and their families be evicted from their homes?" Under the headline *Can evict tenants if "unsatisfactory"* (18/07/57, p. 3), it was reported:

*The Queensland Housing Commissioner (Mr. H. X. Galvin) said last night: "The Commission has power under the Summary Ejectment Act to eject unsatisfactory tenants." .... The Courier Mail put the question to Mr Galvin in writing yesterday following outbreaks of violence on Grovely and other areas, largely caused by Grovely bodgies and widgies.*

Interestingly though, the police had the "bodgie menace" beaten just in time for the August election. An article headed *Bodgie threat beaten* (*Courier Mail*, 29/07/57 p. 3) reported that:

*Street corner and milk bar congregations of Brisbane bodgies and widgies are disappearing. The Police Commissioner, (Mr T. W. Harold) said last night that this was "the divident of a firm but fatherly approach by police to the problem" "Police went up to these young people, gave them a talking to, and in most cases, received co-operation," Mr Harold said. The police blitz on bodgies began 10 days ago following a flood of public complaints about bodgie viciousness.*

### **Two Arrests**

*Mr. Harold said last night policemen had not taken any drastic action and made only two arrests - both for failure to observe a reasonable police direction in regard to pedestrian traffic. He said that police had been instructed to adopt the role of "firm advisers."*

*"I am quite satisfied now that having taken that line of action no one will be worried by bodgies for a long time," Mr Harold said.*

*"We were caught unaware but we have the matter in hand now."*

*Mr Harold said police would continue their vigilance.*

Live performances of rock 'n' roll came to Brisbane at about the same time as the Olympics came to Melbourne. The Stadium, on the corner of Albert and Charlotte Streets dated back to about 1910 from when it functioned as an open-air arena used mostly for boxing and moving pictures. In approximately 1915, it was rebuilt and remained Brisbane's major boxing arena until it was demolished in 1958. As well a boxing arena, it was the venue for what was advertised as a Rock 'n' Roll Festival with an "All-Star Cast" which included a "(f)arewell performance of America's foremost exponent of Rock 'n' Roll, Frankie Thornton, flown from Melbourne especially for this show" (*Courier Mail* 21/11/56,

p. 17). The advertisement didn't mention that Thornton was soon to become the conductor of the Cloudland Ballroom Orchestra. *The Courier Mail* (25/01/57, p. 6) states that Thornton had taken over the orchestra from Billo Smith and refers to him as an "American saxophonist".

As was the case with the reporting on most rock 'n' roll in Australia at the time, the activities (mostly to do with teenagers and the law and order issue) that accompanied the show gained much more attention than did any reporting on the concert itself. On the same page as *The Courier Mail* featured the opening of the Melbourne Olympics, so did they headline a '*Rocker' riot in Brisbane* (*Courier Mail*, 22/11/56, p. 1).

*Police reinforcements were rushed to the Brisbane Stadium when teenagers began rioting in the streets. Trouble started in the Stadium during a rock 'n' roll festival. Police had to quell several disturbances during the show ... Six youths and two girls were later charged at the City watch house on a number of charges including disorderly conduct, assault and obscene language.*

In the Police Court the following day, the police prosecutor is reported to have said that "police had been unprepared for Wednesday night's 'rock 'n' roll' riot, but would be ready if it occurred again" (*Courier Mail* 23/11/56, p. 6). In speaking to the charges brought against William John McClune, the prosecutor said that::

*...after the concert hundreds of teenagers began 'rockin' n' rollin' in Albert Street where they clashed with police. McClune used obscene language and when arrested, threw himself to the footpath. McClune was fined a total of £13 or a month's jail. He was allowed 14 days to pay* (*Courier Mail* 23/11/56, p. 6).

Michael Charles Warren, 17, was a little less fortunate. As a clerk for the Brisbane City Council he had been suspended by the council, "pending the outcome of charges against him arising from a 'rock 'n' roll' disturbance" (*Courier Mail*, 30/11/56).

*Warren pleaded not guilty to having behaved in a disorderly manner in Albert Street: willfully damaged a watch, the property of Constable Mahony: and used insulting words to Detective R. K. Edwards: "Get out you mug copper".*

Desmond Duke's charges resulted from his dancing in the aisles of the bleachers at the concert. "When Duke was told that the dancing had to stop on the instructions of the manager (Mr Potts) he replied [to police]: "You cops won't stop us or the manager either. This is our night" (*Courier Mail*, 11/12/56 p. 11). Duke is reported in the same article to have denied in court "that he was a bodgie".

Reporting on the connection between rock 'n' roll and disorderly behaviour on the part of increasingly evident teenagers made good press all round Australia. Even the Sydney Morning Herald of 22/11/56 gave the Brisbane disturbance front-page headlines along with its coverage of the Melbourne Olympics. "Rock 'n' Roll Rioting in Brisbane" was the headline on page 1 of Thursday's paper, published little more than six hours after the disturbance occurred.

Des Wallace remembers that night. He feels that the word "riot" was a little too harsh to describe the goings on. He remembers that there were nearly as many police cars as people and while there may have been twenty or thirty

people involved, half of them would have been police (Des Wallace **3.3**). Allan Campbell went to the Stadium concert that night with his father and still has the program of that night's performances. He does not remember a disturbance, let alone a riot.

The Rock 'n' Roll Festival at the Stadium on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1956 was not the first program in Brisbane to advertise this new rock 'n' roll. An advertisement in *The Brisbane Telegraph* of Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> of November advised that, at Cloudland, there would be "rock 'n' roll tonight" and that a band called *The Dixielanders* would be playing. The following week a "Big Xmas Jazz Show" was advertised for the City Hall on the evening of Tuesday, November 13<sup>th</sup>. Colin Petersen, Johnny O'Keefe, Betty McQuade and Darcy Kelly were the stars of the show. Admission was set at 10/- and 7/-. This show was part of a series of "Jazz and Variety shows, mostly known as Command Performances. The big shows at the old Brisbane Stadium and the City Hall were a sensation" (Burke 1979, p. 61). Jim Burke organized this series of concerts and his big band, the "Commanders" was used at these concerts (Burke 1979, p. 69).

Betty McQuade was born in Paisley, Scotland in 1941 and came to Australia in 1948. She really enjoyed her dancing training as a child and wanted to become a dancing teacher, a wish that was not to come true partially because of an accident. She started her journey to singing stardom in Jim Burke's Command Performances as a result of winning a talent quest that was run in conjunction with these City Hall shows. In 1956, she entered one of the quests when dared to do so by a school friend. She was successful in the initial

audition with Jimmy Burke and was given a date to perform at City Hall in one of the heats.

*In between I had an accident on a pushbike which shattered the femur in my leg. I thought "well that is the end of that" but Jimmy Burke came to the hospital and visited me and reassured me when I came out of hospital, I could go in the heat of the talent quest. From there I went into the heat and I won the heat and went into the quarter finals and I won the quarter finals.*

*In the heat I think I did Rockin through the Rye. I can't remember now but the numbers that come back to me - I did Seventeen, I know I did that in one of them. I don't know if it was the semi, quarter or the heat. The one that I won with was My Boy Flattop which was the Dorothy Collins song. That was the one that won the final. I mean I didn't expect to get past the first heat. I was very fortunate that I won. When I won the final, Jimmy Burke approached me and said he'd like to manage me. I said "Well you'll have to talk to my Mum." That was it and he got a special underage thing from the government for me to work in the hotels and do shows but you had to be on before 9 and there were strict regulations. So that's how it started. (Betty McQuade ).*

Betty's success came in spite of her having no training in the music field (Betty McQuade **3.4**). Suitable sheet music was difficult for Betty to get because Australia used to "get them when it was just about finished" in other parts of the world. She was fortunate to have a music-teaching aunt back in Scotland who sent her out music as it became available there. Once she received the sheet music for a song she wanted to do, it was only a matter of telling the musicians in the Commanders, a 16 piece band, what song it was and what key it was in.

No charts were ever written for the songs she did, "these guys played by feel" (Betty McQuade **3.7**). And play well they did, because the whole of the City Hall audience used to jump, with everybody stamping their feet on the wooden floor, and many patrons jiving in the aisle. The series of Command performances lasted over several years, well into 1957, and given the band lineup, it is reasonable to suggest that jazz was the favoured musical style (Betty McQuade **3.0, 3.1**).

Jim Burke, as the leader of the band, was a fine musician in the jazz tradition who was able to play whatever he got his hands on. Betty sometimes saw him playing xylophone, other times slap bass and then the triangle – "Whatever the mood took him ... he'd wander." He would obviously enjoy these performances, as would the audiences ("you couldn't get tickets for the jazz concerts at the City Hall") and even though some years later he professed a disdain for rock 'n' roll in the books he wrote, he was not above using it to promote the success of his Command performances. Betty, for instance, was advertised as *Miss Rock 'n' Roll, Australia's Queen of Rock 'n' Roll and Hot Boppin Girl* (Betty McQuade **3.2, 3.3**).

From the perspective of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane, the inclusion of Johnny O'Keefe in the New Command programs and the advertising of him initially, not as a rock 'n' roll singer but as a "Gentleman of Jazz" creates some interest. Many who knew O'Keefe would probably suggest that the advertisement was wrong on both counts - O'Keefe was neither a gentleman nor a jazz singer. The

"gentleman" tag did not sit well with Betty, for instance. Even at this early stage of his career, rather than the traits of a gentleman, he had charisma. The audience would have liked almost anything he did on stage (and off it). He could have sung *Three Blind Mice* and brought the place down. He developed a big following in Brisbane and some, including Jim Burke, would suggest that O'Keefe got his first real break in Brisbane (Betty McQuade **3.9, 3.10**).

By the time O'Keefe was hired by Burke to come to Brisbane in November 1956 to perform at the City Hall, he had had a number of months in the industry as a rock 'n' roll singer. O'Keefe recalled that:

*... I heard Bill Haley singing "Rock Around The Clock" and it really freaked me out like nothing I'd ever heard before. I told myself that I had to get amongst this rock 'n' roll stuff, so for a while I started impersonating Bill Haley (Cited in Sturma 1991, p. 16).*

JOK formed his band called the Dee Jays in September 1956 and began promoting his own dances in halls around Sydney. The Dee Jays didn't accompany him to Brisbane on this first occasion but did so on a later visit for a "Jazz Concert" in the City Hall on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 1957. Jim Burke was not backward in promoting the part he played in JOK's success.

*My old friend Johnny O'Keefe with his rockin' pop never failed me. He started off with a Johnny Ray style when Marianne his first wife was just a sweetheart. I have heard Johnny say on radio that I gave him his first big break. He was a creator of new styles and a better musician than was generally recognized...I was not ashamed to cry when he died on 6 October 1974 - aged 44. (Burke 1979, p. 71).*

Burke was much less complimentary to the rock 'n' roll movement as it unfolded in Brisbane however. The sentiments expressed in the citation below

are probably representative of the thoughts of many who were directly affected by the change from the tradition of organization associated with all facets of ballroom dancing to the disorganization with which rock 'n' roll was being associated.

*Bill Haley's Comets played reasonably good music and the introduction of Rock 'n' Roll was not foreboding, but when electronic amplifiers which can be driven without a license took over, all hell was let loose and music took a very smart nose dive.*

*Then came the by-product, the musical maggot who was a drugged, dirty, guitar swaggering rebel. The misuse of electronic amplification became the vehicle of ear rupturing sounds to build up mass hysteria. Take my word for it, the frenzies in effect, cause teenagers to be brainwashed or hog washed into giving a perverted victory sign to the oldies. If you have been unfortunate enough to attend certain types of pop concerts, the screams and blasts can cause a banshee like echo to recur in your eardrums for days ahead.*

*The amplified guitar spelt doom to many talented modern and dance musicians. The construction of a rock group is primarily simple and the cult will survive as long as eardrums. (Burke 1979, p. 79)*

Colin Petersen was originally from Brisbane and by late 1956 had made a name for himself in the "Smiley" pictures. The legendary Harry Lebler taught most of the successful drummers in Brisbane at this time. Darryl Wright remembers, as a nine or ten year old, an association with both Lebler and Petersen when each was considered by Lebler to be a budding protégé (Darryl Wright 3.1). Betty remembers the Christmas show of 1956 when Colin Petersen was advertised as a featured artist:

*Actually they had a drum battle. The program had got Colin Petersen sitting on a kit of drums. It must have been the Christmas show because he had a little Santa hat on. I think it was Harry Lebler that they had and*

*they did a drum duet, a battle of the drums. They used to do that quite a lot. They brought out Buddy Rich, I think it was Buddy Rich they brought out and they had another drum battle. But they also used to bring up Sydney bands and have a battle of the bands. They would get a Brisbane band and the DJs and all this. They were still battling and all this. But good promotion and good vibes because a lot of the Sydney people used to come up to Brisbane for these shows and support the DJs, you know. So you still had that thing but it was good for the business, creating more crowds and also letting Sydney people see that there were people in Brisbane with talent. Because Brisbane was known as the backwoods and this is what I mean, It couldn't have been that backward because this is where O'Keefe got off the mat. They weren't fussed on him down in Sydney and, you know, he worked up here. (Betty McQuade)*

So strong was the association between juvenile delinquency and rock 'n' roll at this time that to call these performances by the name "rock 'n' roll" would have meant that the City Hall would not have been made available to the promoters. Cloudland didn't seem to have a problem with either the name or competitions. They advertised a series of rock 'n' roll competitions on Wednesday nights leading up to a "final of the rock 'n' roll jive competition" held on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> of November (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 28/11/56 p. 44). The promoters at City Hall seemed to gain some confidence and advertised a "rock 'n' roll jive premiere" for Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> of November, featuring Rick Farbach and his Bill Haley Combination (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 22/11/56 p. 44). In a conversation in September 1999, Rick Farbach vowed that he "never played rock 'n' roll".

Cloudland continued advertising rock 'n' roll on Wednesday nights right up until the 19<sup>th</sup> of December and then opened the new season and the new year with a new rock 'n' roll competition by promoting their new band director Frankie Thornton. A rock 'n' roll and jazz night was advertised for the Jimboomba Memorial Hall to be held on Friday, 25/01/57, however no band was advertised (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 21/01/57 p. 37). January 1957 was the time when Bill Haley came to Brisbane and it was the time when the radio stations dipped tentative toes into the waters of rock 'n' roll. Cloudland had advertised that Norman Llewellyn from 4BH would compere the third heat of the rock 'n' roll competition on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> of November. 4KQ got into the rock 'n' roll act with advertisements for Hal Gorcey compering a rock 'n' roll show on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> of February. Bill Gates invited 4BH listeners to "Meet the Hon Tony Moynihan in the rock 'n' roll show" on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1957. That "Gentleman of Jazz" was in Brisbane again on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> of March and performed with Betty McQuade in the City Hall (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 04/03/57, p. 37).

Probably the most significant step for Brisbane rock 'n' roll musicians came with the promotion of another "Jazz Concert" in City Hall featuring Johnny O'Keefe on Tuesday, 30<sup>th</sup> of April. This was the first time the Dee Jays had accompanied O'Keefe to Brisbane and they were advertised in *The Brisbane Telegraph* (30/04/57, p. 33) as the "Delinquent Juveniles"<sup>2</sup>. In the printed

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<sup>2</sup> According to Sturma (1991), "Dee was for Dave and Jay was for Johnny". Johnny O'Keefe formed his band with an American sax player by the name of Dave Owens.

program that was provided for this performance, Burke asks the question "Is Rock n Roll Jazz" (sic) and answers it as follows.

*It may not be good jazz - but of its fundamental blues progression - it is related to jazz. In fact some of the early recordings have a similar beat.*

*Without jazz - there would be no "Rock n Roll", so to all of you self-styled Jazz specialists, lets face it - don't be snobbish - its here for sure and will definitely leave some heritage of its form behind. It all contributes to the art of Jazz - out of bad comes good - so kids, let's know when you get tired of that mechanical rhythm - as for us - we make no apologies for inclusion of "Rock n Roll" and to our critics we say "nertz".* (from the official program for the New Series No 9 Command Performance, April 30, 1957. Program supplied by Betty McQuade).

On the same program, Chuck Supplice and the Six Rocketeers were advertised, the first time a Brisbane rock 'n' roll band was advertised in *The Telegraph* for a rock 'n' roll show. Supplice and all of his band members came from the bay side suburbs to the east of Brisbane and he had gathered around him a number of good musicians. Betty McQuade remembers Chuck Supplice as a good lead guitarist (Betty McQuade 3.11). Ron Carroll (see p. 309) was the piano player in the Rocketts in the City Hall that night.

*With that band we played at the City Hall and I can remember that we weren't well accepted in some places by some people because here was a rock 'n' roll piano player playing on a large grand piano and not only that, he was standing and not sitting. He had on blue jeans, a blue cap and a leopard skin shirt.* (Ron Carroll 3.1).

The Rocketts were the first rock 'n' roll band to kick off in Brisbane, but at the same time Allan Reed, probably early in 1957 when he was in the process of changing his band from a country band to a rock 'n' roll band, was on the prowl.

He remembers some contacts with Chuck Supplice and other members of the Rocketts. Allan had traveled down to Wynnum to the RSL where the Rocketts were playing with the express intention of pilfering some of Chuck's band members. Ozzie Mengel had played with Allan in his country band prior to joining the Rocketts, but it was not Ozzie that Allan was after. Johnny Pickering was singing and impressed Allan enough for him to make an offer which Johnny accepted. During the same visit to the Wynnum RSL, Dulcie Day arrived, not wanting to pilfer musicians, but whole bands (Allan Reed **3.1**).

As has been mentioned, Jack Busteads Dance Studio had been involved in teaching jive for a number of years and it must have become obvious that there would be a need for the teaching of rock 'n' roll. Busteads began advertising rock 'n' roll classes on Wednesday afternoons at 5pm for a charge of 3/- (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 01/05/57 p. 44) while patrons in the Northern Suburbs were invited to "Rock around the Zillmere clock at the Zillmere School of Arts every Friday night, beginners tutored" (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 17/05/57 p. 32). At the same time, the first of the suburban dances which featured a local rock 'n' roll band was advertised in *The Brisbane Telegraph* for Friday 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 1957. The dance was to be held at Norman Park, in a hall that was situated at tram stop 24 on the Balmoral tramline. The Rocketts were to be playing and the entry fee was set at 3/-. While there is no mention of Chuck Supplice, all things point to the band being the same one as was advertised for the Johnny O'Keefe Jazz Concert in the City Hall not much more than two weeks earlier.

After an initial burst, Cloudland refrained from advertising rock 'n' roll, preferring instead to promote its "Modern Dancing". City Hall also had a slight change of heart because their next production on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> of June was advertised as a "New Command Jazz Concert, Rock 'n' Roll v Calypso" (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 05/06/57 p. 48). It would be interesting to know the extent to which Jim Burke, as the promoter, was influenced by a trend which was reported in Australian newspapers suggesting that Calypso music was going to take over from rock 'n' roll. Arthur Richards in an article published in *The Courier Mail* (22/04/57, p. 2) and a number of other Australian newspapers wrote:

*For what comfort it may give you I pass on the news that rock 'n' roll seems to be on its way out - and Elvis Presley on his way to the dustbins of memory. Hallelujah!*

*The youngsters crowding Queen Street music stores are beginning to switch now to the loose, unbuttoned Trinidad music known as Calypso. Harry Belafonte, among others, sings it.*

Calypso must have been quite socially acceptable because, according to Richards, "[t]here were Calypso songs on for the Queen's coronation and on Princess Margaret's visit." The trend to calypso that Richards reported was probably little more than wishful thinking since it was short lived, if in fact it ever existed.

The Rocketts were clearly gaining in confidence for their next outing was to Cannon Hill when an advertisement (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 05/06/57, p. 48) invited patrons to "rock 'n' roll with the Rocketts jive band." Much has been

made over the years regarding Brisbane as a backwater, especially when it comes to the introduction of new music. The fact is though, that, with regard to its introduction, it was not all that far behind what was happening in Sydney. According to Jackson (2000, p. 61), Alan Dale (and his band the Houserockers) was the first artist to run a rock 'n' roll dance.

*... Alan, having already had five years experience in running dances, hired out the Maroubra Memorial Hall, and was the first artist to run a Rock 'n' Roll dance in Australia on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1957. Alan told me he paid 4 pound to hire the hall, and after deducting all expenses he and the band all took home 3 pound ea. Things were really going great that night until the local Church put pressure on the Council, complaining about Rock 'n' Roll. The Council closed the dance down.*

On the same night as the Rocketts were playing at Cannon Hill, the "Blue Ribbon Championships including the Queensland Rock 'n' Roll Championships" were held at Cloudland. It must have been quite a spectacular night at Cloudland with rock 'n' roll gaining some credibility, at least as far as *The Courier Mail* was concerned. The following day, the paper carried a page one photo of two of the contestants in the rock 'n' roll championships. The accompanying text makes interesting reading.

*ROCK 'N' ROLLERS Diane Green of Dutton Park and Rafino Peoples of Chermside, warming up to their vigorous bid for the State title at Cloudland last night. A sprained ankle was no handicap for Diane. Rafino wore charcoal grey trousers, light grey coat, with charcoal collar and pockets, pink shirt and a gold tie. Diane and her partner were beaten for the title by Rita Lewis and Kevin Byers. (CM, 06/06/57 p. 1).*

Meanwhile, Cannon Hill advertised a different band. From Friday 7<sup>th</sup> of June it was the Palm Serenader's Jive band who appeared at Cannon Hill for several weeks. Johnny O'Keefe was back in Brisbane for a New Command

Jazz Concert in the City Hall on Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> of June at which it was to be "Rock 'n' roll v Jazz and Jive (BT, 25/06/57 p. 29). Cloudland had secured regular Wednesday night dances that focused on rock 'n' roll and over the next two weeks they promoted a "modern dance with special Rock 'n' Roll floor show" followed by a "Rock 'n' Roll Duel, Queensland v New South Wales, 5000 seats".

### **The Day Job**

Music was not the only thing on the minds of musicians at this time. Very few of them earned enough money from their music jobs to entice them to give up their day jobs. So juggling the demands of a day job, a music job and the sleep required to support both was important, if not to the musician, then certainly to the day job employer. The Public Service overcame that problem by officially not allowing its employees to have a second job. That rule must have been applied differently according to the situation. For instance, Gerry Troughton was an apprentice draughtsman in the Queensland Railway and according to his wife Bev (see p. 320), left their employ and gained employment with the Brisbane City Council so he could continue his music jobs. On the other hand, Dooley MacDonnell (see p. 315) worked for Queensland Railway most of his life, much of the early time in western Queensland and also maintained his part time music career as their employee.

For Darryl Wright, working a couple of nights a week and maintaining a day job was not a problem. But when it came to working four and five nights a week, things became a little more serious. His employer at the time was Royal Dalton Potteries and his boss asked him if he was serious about his day job or

did want to become a musician. The answer to that question for Darryl was always that the day job was his first priority. He gave the example of playing at a football club on Sunday evening and often not getting to bed until 4am on Monday morning.

*Obviously you didn't perform very well at work that day so it became a bit of a problem ... You certainly couldn't make a living out of music in those days. Even the better-known people were all struggling trying to make ends meet. (Darryl Wright).*

After leaving school, Alan Campbell obtained a job as a store-man at Fordigraph Agencies under a manager who was a former trumpet player at Cloudland. Alan didn't see eye to eye with his boss who had made a decision to quit music and study for promotion within the company. He felt that Alan should follow a similar path.

*... he said you should study and do management courses and such things and try to get ahead. I did do Dale Carnegie and all those kind of things but I still played my music. I was playing sometimes three or four nights a week. But I had to get the money to pay for the bills. Now days, two people work but in those days only one person worked and the wife stayed home and looked after the kids. So the way to get a house was to have two jobs. I was getting more money out of the band than I was at work. That's what bosses are like. I used to get more money from playing than I did from work. (Alan Campbell)*

So although his boss didn't like the idea of Alan being a musician, there was never any problem as far as getting his work done. He did his job well but

put much more energy into his music than into his day job. His music made him popular with his fellow workers to the extent that one of the girls who worked in the office wrote a poem about him.

*Wrapping wrapping all the day,  
Alan spends his time this way,  
Strumming strumming all the night,  
Quite a star but not so bright.*

*[I] always remember that because I was a dummy you might as well say.  
I spent more time with my music and my boss didn't like it in those days  
but he accepted it (Alan Campbell)*

Working for Fordigraph did have an advantage for Alan, he was able to create stencils and print advertising material for his music exploits on the office duplicator.

Brian Gagen (see p. 311) was a jeweller and at one time, worked for a company called Nissens, the Jewellers as well as playing with the Planets four or five nights a week. His boss was an older gentleman who had his hair trimmed and cut every week. Brian was in charge of the repair section at the time and was visited one day by his boss who said very firmly and without much humour: "Mr Gagen, your hair is over your collar." He left without further ado. According to Brian, his employers took a

*... fairly jaundiced view [of his music related activities] and invariably because of my extra-curricular activity I would invariably arrive late. But at the end of the day I always used to stay late because they would*

*never let me finish exactly on time. There was always something extra to do after payment had stopped. (Brian Gagen).*

Len Austin (see p. 307) joined the Brisbane City Council Electricity Department as a clerk and worked his day job without any hassle from his employers. He felt that was because he did his job well. At the same time though, he was making more from his music job than from his day job, a situation that continued for much of his playing career.

Bob Halliwell had a “day” job as a movie theatre projectionist that involved both day and night work. He was able to juggle his shifts to allow him to work at his music job and his regular job. His employers were not always pleased with his second job though.

*They owned the Lyceum Theatre and the Civic Theatre and the son Jimmy owned the Princess Theatre at Mt Gravatt. Jimmy thought I was into drugs or what ever, because drugs were starting to become known in those days and because I was in a band and all that sort of thing, and he was a lay preacher, I think that he thought that I was into all that sort of scene which I wasn't. I just loved singing. I don't think they liked it.*

(Bob Halliwell)

## Conclusion

Rock 'n' roll came to Brisbane via the dances, the dancers, the pictures, the radio, the music and the musicians. Of that group of six, the most hesitant to adopt the new trend was radio. As a family orientated medium, Brisbane radio in 1956 failed to see the “rock 'n' roll” writing on the wall probably because

it was yet to be challenged by television as had been the case in southern states and overseas. Any doubt DJs may have had as to the popularity of rock 'n' roll must have been challenged by the Bill Haley concert in a way that letters and phone calls to the station from individuals had not. Twenty thousand Brisbane people and the money they were prepared to pay can't be wrong so radio stations started scheduling rock 'n' roll. By 1957, new bands were playing it in new venues and newspapers were beginning to report it in a slightly more positive light

The birth of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane was not without its pain or its excitement. The excitement for the teenagers was often in the challenge to, and the obliteration of, the "old art form". The pain on the other hand can be identified with the success that the challenge was having not only in changing traditions associated with the established venues, especially City Hall and Cloudford, but also in the opening up of new and successful dances in the suburban halls. The importance of these suburban halls and the changes associated with the entertainment associated with the established venues will be addressed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Rock Sets In**

#### **Introduction**

According to Cockington (2001, p. 4) early rock ‘n’ roll in Australia was a “deeply suburban phenomenon”. While he looked only to Melbourne and Sydney to support his argument, Brisbane could have been used equally well. For Melbourne, the “tough northern suburbs” of Coburg, Pascoe Vale, Thornbury, Brunswick and Glenroy were the cradle of rock ‘n’ roll. In Sydney, while Johnny O’Keefe came from the relative comfort of middle class inner-city surrounds (see for example Renate, 1998), Col Joye and his family hailed from the outer southwest working-class suburb of East Hills.

In looking at the development of Brisbane’s rock ‘n’ roll, its progress can be explained very well using terms associated with the growth of a human being. Its birth occurred in the organised, established city venues of The Stadium, City Hall and Cloudland as was its brief childhood, its growth hormones responded to a visit to The Stadium by Bill Haley and the Comets, its teenage years were spent in suburban halls searching for the freedom to grow and its maturity saw its return to the financial security and control of the large, established and organised city venues as well as to the new specialist rock ‘n’ roll venues such as Birdland, TCs and Teen City.

While the big halls, The Stadium, City Hall and Cloudland, provided an initial home for rock 'n' roll, it was unable to flourish in the structured stratosphere of these venues. Rock 'n' roll was more than the music. While bands such as that led by Jim Burke at the City Hall or Billo Smith at Cloudland were able to play music suitable for the jive, jitterbug and even rock 'n' roll of the mid-fifties, they were unable to provide, and probably didn't wish to, the atmosphere in which the latter could flourish in its teenage years. New musicians, new venues, new instruments, new music and new promoters were required to create the excitement that was rock 'n' roll.

This chapter will begin with an examination of two examples of rock 'n' roll in its late childhood, the Rocketts and the Hucklebucks, Brisbane's first rock 'n' roll bands. The growth spurt into the teenage years that followed Bill Haley's visit is then demonstrated using the venues, dances and bands and a timeline of their activities. The growth from birth to maturity could not have taken place without a strong support network. The closing section of this chapter will scrutinize some of the important authoritative influences that made up this support network for Brisbane rock 'n' roll in its teenage years - parents, schools and churches.

### **The Rocketts**

The Rocketts were the first rock 'n' roll band to form in Brisbane and they began playing at some time shortly prior to Bill Haley's Brisbane concert. Ron Carroll was the piano player with the band. He had learned the violin for many

years but decided that he liked playing the piano sufficiently to learn enough about chords to play blues and rock 'n' roll.

*At quite a young age I was asked to join a rock 'n' roll band in Wynnum. They were rehearsing down near the Wynnum Central Station, at a little hall that the Girl Guides used to have. On guitar and it later turned out to be lead guitar was a chap called Chuck Supplice, on rhythm guitar was Ozzie Mengel, our vocalist was Kenny McKercher. I sat in with them and we got on all right and we added a drummer, Jimmy Lloyd who was also a Wynnum boy and a tenor sax Billy Penrose, also a Wynnum lad. We named the group the Rocketts. To my knowledge, it was the first live rock band up here in Brisbane. We started to get a few jobs at local RSL clubs around Brisbane and other places ... (Ron Carroll 4.3).*

Because the Rocketts started very early in the history of rock 'n' roll and were the first such band in Brisbane, getting enough material to fill a night was initially a problem. Songs were learned from wherever they were heard.

*We actually rehearsed for quite a while before we did a job. I must say that in those days, you worked for 20 minutes and you were off for 20 minutes. Not like today where you'd work for nearly an hour and then have 10 minutes off ... In the earlier times, when we kicked off and we probably felt it the most, there wasn't a lot of people doing the sort of stuff we were playing. It didn't take all that long before the material started becoming available with bands starting up everywhere and the radio starting to play the music (Ron Carroll).*

Some songs that were played by the band to help fill the night were not necessarily rock 'n' roll standards but songs the band members knew and were able to put a rock 'n' roll beat to.

*A lot of it was just the singer learning to sing the song. There was only three chords to the songs, they weren't very difficult to play. Chuck used to play a lot of guitar boogie and stuff and I used to do boogie on the piano. So yes that [sufficient material] was a problem in the initial stages* (Ron Carroll **4.1**).

As the piano player in the Rocketts, Ron Carroll had to make do with whatever piano was available in the hall in which the band was playing. Often the hall piano was not too flash.

*[The pianos were] always a problem and a lot of them were in bad condition. Some of them, the ivories were missing and had cigarettes put on them, out of tune and some needed re-felting. It was hard for a piano player ... the guitarists, they drowned you out. It would have been nice to have had the electric keyboards that are available today* (Ron Carroll **4.4**).

Not all halls presented such a problem. The City Hall grand piano “was very well done because they catered for a different type of player. They had what was called a strip mike that went right across the strings inside.” (Ron Carroll).

Most of the Rocketts’ early jobs were in RSL halls in the Wynnum/Cannon Hill area, though they were not particularly regular. The first job that attracted large numbers of patrons, and that had a significant effect on the way suburban dances were run in Brisbane was held in the RSL hall at the Balmoral tram terminus. As the first of the suburban rock ‘n’ roll dances featuring live music, it attracted patrons from other established venues, especially those playing recorded music. The Rocketts ran the dance

themselves and collected the money from the door as well as from a drinks stall that was also financially successful. In order to get access to the hall the band had to meet certain requirements.

*Yes well I'm not sure exactly how Chuck did that, or Ozzie, but I know that they had to go and meet with the RSL people and they had to discuss what percentage of the door that they would take. All that and then they stipulated that we had to have 2 policemen and that we would have to pay for them. They also stipulated the hours that it would operate. But there was no problem initially getting the thing started and I think it was only a matter of a month and we were packing the place out (Ron Carroll).*

RSL halls in those days were very different to the establishments we see today.

*... no more than a hall with a stage at one end and toilets out the back yard. This particular one [Balmoral], as you came into the hall had a library, just a small room with books (Ron Carroll).*

As a band, the Rocketts lasted for about a year until changes were made resulting in a new band called the Blue Jeans. Ozzie Mengel moved back to a country band and Darby Wilson became rhythm guitarist with the Blue Jeans. Ron Carroll remembers that Darby played both rhythm and bass guitar. "It was a significant change to the band with bass coming in." The Blue Jeans went on to become a very successful Brisbane band holding down a weekly gig at Cloudland for some time as well as playing at various suburban venues around the city. They also played regularly at the Gold Coast.

*We did a number of jobs for a chap called Claude Carnell. We played at the Beach Comber and we also played on the back of a truck at*

*Greenmount Beach, near the kiosk there, rock 'n' roll, and that was quite popular. We used to do this nightclub, not the one that was near the creek, the one that was up in the hills in those days (Ron Carroll).*

### The Hucklebucks

John and Aileen McCourt commenced teaching jive to the young people of Mt Gravatt in March 1955, firstly at their home, and when the numbers became too great for their lounge room, they formed a club and hired the local community Memorial Hall, continuing there until the latter part of 1957. Rent payment for the Memorial Hall was paid to a Mr Pettigrew, an estate agent in Mt Gravatt. Their classes were held each Monday evening and parents would often drop their children at the Hall and the McCourts would make sure the children got home, often in the back of their ute.

Admission to the evening was 2/- at a time when wages were about £15 a week. Most nights, they would attract around 40 people but on special nights such as a competition night, up to 150 people would attend. An important part of the club's social life was attending dances as a group on Friday and Saturday nights. Older children were encouraged to accompany them, even as far away as Ipswich, sometimes to do demonstrations but most often just to dance. (Aileen McCourt **4.1**). Because this was a time when it was considered ungodly to be involved in rock 'n' roll, the McCourts still remember being considered "evil" by some, but not all, people in their community.

Allan Reed's new rock 'n' roll band, which crossed over from country to rock 'n' roll in mid 1957, had no name when they first agreed to play for the McCourts at Mt Gravatt. In the initial stages, any name that would get a little publicity, such as *Alsation and his Hot Dogs*, filled the bill. Allan had been invited by the McCourts to use the Mt Gravatt Jive Club meeting as a practise venue (hence no pay) because the younger members of their club had been hassling for some live music in addition to the records that were played on the club's record player.

Unfortunately, Allan's band was not quite ready for the job. They were still without a drummer a couple of weeks before the first gig.

*I ran into this young fella by the name of Lindsay Doig. I was having my guitar amp fixed up. I had made this amplifier and a friend of mine had this electrical business down in Brunswick Street down in the Valley and he was making adjustments to the amplifier and I just started playing my guitar through it and this young fella was standing at the door way, it was Lindsay Doig. He came in and said, "Hey man, that's good stuff." I was playing Guitar Boogie on the guitar. He said, "I like that." I told him I was kicking off this band and I wanted to hep it up from country to rock 'n' roll beat. So he joined our band. He told me he had a set of Pearl Drums which was a complete fabrication because all he had was a pair of sticks. He had the backside out of his pants in other words.*

*... he was a good little drummer. Our furniture, we'd only just renewed all our furniture, this is when I first got married, we'd just bought a house up at Jubilee Terrace Bardon and that was our band practise house. We used to practice there every Thursday night. The backs of the chairs, he always had an excuse that his drums were down in Sydney and they're*

*getting re-glittered and all that sort of thing, but it just wasn't so, the kid was so desperate to get in with a band, this is what he fabricated (Allan Reed 4.0)*

With their first gig less than two weeks away, things started to get a bit desperate in the percussion department. The backs of chairs were fine for rehearsals but were not going to be suitable for any public performances at the Mt Gravatt Jive Club, regardless of the minimal remuneration promised.

*So we just practised and practised but this was all sprung on us within a fortnight and we still didn't have any drums. So old Pop Tucker from Little Street Kelvin Grove, I knew he used to play in the Salvation Army band so I went over there, you wouldn't bloody read about it, he had the drums alright. The big bass drum had red and blue going right around the circumference. The sticks were the ones you tie around your neck. The snare drum about a foot and a half deep with red and blue stripes going around it with copper snare going across the top of it. The cymbal was about that big. So what we did just to make sure we had some form of beat, we fabricated this bass drum pedal from one of the big sticks cause it was all covered with dust and Pop Tucker said "I don't care what you do with the bloody things as long as it gets you going." So we fabricated a mechanical device on a spring so that it went thump, thump on the bass drum. It kept on walking away so we stuck a couple of blocks of wood in front of it. So that was our first go at using the drums. The snare drum sounded like a billy goat pooping in a kerosene tin - shocking. So at any rate we took the thing and the only microphone we had was an old tape recorder. It had a little plastic microphone and so that was our mike. So we put Pickering up there and we opened up with Splish Splash ... The kids loved it, they loved the sound, I don't know why because it was bloody terrible. Anyway they got us back the*

*following night and this time we'd improved slightly on the gear, very slightly (Allan Reed 4.1).*

A suitable name still eluded the group until John McCourt came up with a brilliant idea. On the second week, he ran a competition at the dance hall with a 30/- prize for the best name for the band if the band liked it. A young man called Les Bogaart won the prize. Allan Reed remembers it this way.

*We didn't have a name for the band and so Johnny and Aileen McCourt organized for us to come back the following Friday night ...when we got there, Johnny was running this competition. He issued little pencils to the people and they had to write the name that you'd like to call this band. So we got "The Midnight Cowboys."...*

*At any rate they came up with The Hucklebucks. At that particular time the song The Hucklebuck had just come out and everybody seemed to like it. So being all men bucks, I said "Righto what about Hucklebucks."... [They came up with some] very impossible names - The Four Skins, Buster Hymen and the Penetrators, The Midnight Cowboys. This is exactly what they came up with all right. We could cop it, we did have to cop it and so we became resident there starting up then (Allan Reed 4.2).*

So the Hucklebucks began regular practise/performances at the Mt Gravatt Jive Club. One night, the Hucklebucks' 'smoking guitars' created some excitement. John McCourt remembers the band members had been working on some part of their equipment and while they were playing after making some adjustments, "all of a sudden, puffing and crackling - smoke in the air." All the kids were cheering. Once reminded, Allan Reed remembered the situation.

*I forgot about that. It would be nothing at all for the damn thing to blow up. We didn't have anything earthed in those days. We are lucky we didn't kill ourselves (Allan Reed).*

### **Brisbane's Early Rock 'n' Roll Timeline**

In June 1957, both the Rocketts and the Palm Serenaders Jive Band were advertising rock 'n' roll in halls situated in the Eastern suburbs of Brisbane. While the Rocketts had begun playing at the Norman Park RSSAILA on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1957 (*Brisbane Telegraph* 17/05/57, p. 32) and moved to Cannon Hill within a month, the Palm Serenaders must have gained the inside running at Cannon Hill, staying there for a number of weeks. Meanwhile, Jim Burke was not missing a trick with his New Command Jazz Concerts in City Hall. Johnny O'Keefe was again the featured artist on Tuesday June 25, 1957, this time advertised as the "Australian King of rock 'n' roll".

On Friday 19<sup>th</sup> of June, the Rocketts jive club had moved to Bulimba tram terminus and one week later, at Cannon Hill, the Palm Serenaders were advertised with guests artists, the Hucklebucks, the first time the new band had been advertised in the newspapers. During August and September of that year, the rock 'n' roll scene became relatively busy in the eastern suburbs of Cannon Hill, Morningside, and Norman Park. As well, an ad did appear on 23/08/57 for the McCourt's Mr Gravatt dances in August, featuring the Hucklebucks.

Jim Burke stuck to his good thing. In promoting his Spring Jazz Show in the City Hall on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1957, Johnny O'Keefe and Rick Farbach were advertised as the major attractions. "Hell Skiffle with Ricky Farbach

featuring *Freight Train* and bye bye rock 'n' roll with Johnny O'Keefe" (*Brisbane Telegraph* 27/08/57, p. 33). While Burke was advertising and promoting a 'bye bye rock 'n' roll' program in City Hall, other promoters and bands were doing just the opposite to saying bye bye to rock 'n' roll. The Brisbane Jive Club featured the Rocketts on 30<sup>th</sup> of August while the *All Star Rockers* jive band started up a dance at tram stop 17, Ashgrove on Tuesday 17/09/57.

In the meantime, Dulcie Day had maintained her activity in the dance area by investigating ways of spreading her wings into this new rock 'n' roll. One day she said to husband Tom, "I think I've got a venue." The venue Dulcie had obtained was the Judean Hall in Deshon Street, Wooloongabba - tram stop 16. Typical of the letter Dulcie may have written in applying for the use of a hall follows.

14 Barton St  
Holland Park

*To the Manager*

*Sir*

*I, Mrs. Dulcie M Day make formal application to rent hall one weekly night for the purpose of conducting a jive and rock 'n' roll dance. For some time now I have been conducting similar dances at various halls. As I have been hard put to accommodate the increasing numbers, hence my desire to acquire the hall for this purpose. I can submit other references from other halls and other directions if so desired as I have been connected with dancing for a number of years. And, I can assure you that every effort will be given to same to conduct similar dances with an assurance of respectable conduct and care of the ballroom. Might I add that same will be approved of. And shall be glad if you will submit this application as early as possible. And hope that same will be approved of.*

*Thanking you in anticipation,*

*I am*

*Yours faithfully*

*(Mrs) D. M. Day*

*Phone 97 - 7236*

The above letter is one that Tom has kept. It is not dated but it is clearly written some time after her first experience at running and promoting a dance and it is very clear that there was a need to convince the hall committee that some semblance of civility would be maintained at her dances. Tom seems to think that this was the letter written to the South Brisbane Library committee asking for the use of their hall. He remembers clearly Dulcie's first attempt at promoting a dance. It occurred at a time when it was traditional for dances in Brisbane to be run in aid of some charitable cause and Dulcie picked the building being built to house Charles Kingsford Smith's plane at Eagle Farm airport.

Dulcie advised the public that she was planning to run a dance in the Judean Hall in Deshon Street Wooloongabba via an advertisement in *The Brisbane Telegraph*. According to Tom, there were no other dances like it in Brisbane at the time so she was excited to be able to offer a rock 'n' roll dance with music supplied by the Hucklebucks. The first advertisement for a Dulcie Day dance appeared in *The Telegraph* on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> of October, 1957 which read "Rock 'n' Roll tomorrow night at Judean Hall, Deshon Street, tramstop 16, Wooloongabba" (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 14/10.57 p. 32). So part of the proceeds was going to the appeal to build the Kingsford Smith War Memorial, an appeal that was launched on 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1957. According to *The Courier Mail* of the following day, over £800 was raised in the first day (*Courier Mail*, 17/09/57 p. 1).

An ad of some historical interest appeared in *The Telegraph* on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> of October 1957. It read: "Rock 'n' Roll - Next Monday's show is cancelled due to Little Richard's retirement from show business. Full refunds." Lee Gordon had been promoting the ill-fated Little Richard - Gene Vincent - Eddie Cochrane tour in *The Telegraph* during the prior week at 5/- a ticket, a rather small charge considering the entry fee advertised two weeks earlier which ranged from 9/6 to 39/6.

Tom well remembers those early days, partly because they were so busy.

*It turned out that once it started, you've never seen anything like it. Kids come from all over Brisbane. The people in the street were absolutely amazed. They'd never seen anything like it. She ran competitions and*

*one band was formed and then another was formed and so she had 2 then, the Planets and the Hucklebucks. That's what she called them ...But that was the beginning. I've never seen anything like it. She went from one hall to another till we were going 4 and 5 nights a week, different parts of Brisbane. We had the South Brisbane Library Hall going, I think that was on a Tuesday night. The Windsor School of Arts was another little hall, that was the next one, then we went to Riverside Ballroom, we had that going (Tom Day 4.3).*

Dulcie Day was a born promoter and loved the thrill of setting up a new show. Advertising played an important part in the success of her operation, so much so that she perfected a system that kept her going for years. This involved billboard, newspaper and hand delivered advertising. To open a new function, she would often begin with advertising that function on a billboard such as those seen from the railway in Upper Edward Street or at Wooloongabba;

*...she'd state the place, "Rock 'n' roll, Hibernian Hall." She wouldn't include the date. Then the date would come out. The crowds would come. A fellow by the name of Carl Ruckett used to do all the painting for the paper posters. He'd hand do them. They were huge, easily 30 [feet] by 30 ... not a lot of writing (Tom Day)*

She would then have some flyers printed and Tom's job would be to distribute them to a targeted audience, very often to students at a local high school. As the function approached, Dulcie would insert a small ad in the Telegraph, mostly on the day of the function. In her early days, she would often not include her name in the advertising, rather using "Yours Truly" as a kind of a nom de plume. People soon came to recognise that as meaning Dulcie Day.

*In the paper ads, she used to advertise in the Telegraph. She never put big ads, only a little small, say 2 inches, that's all it required in the entertainment section of the Telegraph ... [The Courier] was no good. The Telegraph specialised in it. They used to buy it for the entertainment and all the entertainment would be all in one page (Tom Day).*

The Telegraph clearly had a reputation as the entertainment newspaper.

*Well all the advertising that was done to get crowds was done in the Telegraph. The Telegraph was the afternoon paper ... Everyone read that afternoon paper and would know what was going on (John Bell).*

Another form of enticement she used was to provide a free bus to and from the venue. This bus was most often a City Council bus from City Hall at the beginning of the dance returning to the same spot after the dance with the departure and return time clearly stated in the advertising. This would have no doubt helped to reassure some parents that their children would be safe during their night out.

The first rock 'n' roll dance at the Windsor School of Arts (tram stop 20) was advertised for Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 1958. Whether Dulcie promoted it is difficult to say since there was no band advertised. However, two weeks later, The Black Slacks band was advertised for that same venue.

By November of 1957, regular rock 'n' roll dances were being advertised at Cannon Hill, Deshon Street, Norman Park, Ashgrove and Morningside. During this month, Dulcie had been advertising a rock 'n' roll and jive competition at Deshon Street. The semi-final was held on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and the

final on the following week. For the final she promised streamers and novelties in the promotion of the night (*Brisbane Telegraph* 10/12/57, p. 52). The Hucklebucks were the regular band for the Deshon Street Tuesday night dances, according to *The Telegraph* advertisements. At the same time, the All Star Rockers were playing at Ashgrove on Wednesday nights and the Rocketts at either Morningside or Cannon Hill on Friday nights. The Rocketts changed their name to the Blue Jeans during November, so the Blue Jeans continued playing at the regular Friday night Cannon Hill dances from November 29<sup>th</sup>.

Gary Vize (see p. 320) has fond memories of the Blue Jeans. He moved from Rockhampton to Brisbane when he was fifteen years old after having been greatly impressed by the movie *Rock around the Clock*. His first real memories of the rock 'n' roll scene in Brisbane are associated with the Blue Jeans. He was too young to actually go to the dances but remembers Chuck Supplice as the guitar player and Billy Hill as the singer. Later on when he was playing guitar himself, Billy used to turn up at his dances and sing. According to Gary, Billy was a really gifted blues singer, probably the best blues singer he ever heard.

It was not all plain sailing for the bands in these early days. Payment for work performed was not always a certainty, nor was a polite reception from the audience. The name of the game at that time was getting things going and bands would do almost anything for that to happen. Allan Reed had opened up at Deshon Street with Dulcie Day and Chuck Supplice and his band had been playing at their East Brisbane venues for some short time. The problem for Allan and his band was that if the crowd didn't turn up to Deshon Street, they

received only part of what they were entitled to. At the time, Allan worked for the Goodyear Tyre and Rubber Company during the day and was moonlighting as a guitar player at night. As far as he was concerned, in spite of his poor education, he was able to understand that in order to raise a family, he had to earn as much as he could. So it was decided that the band would begin promoting their own dances and work for Dulcie and other promoters on a strictly cash basis.

The opportunity presented itself when Chuck Supplice lost the Cannon Hill hall and Allan was invited to start a dance in the hall. Chuck took his band to the Morningside Hall, a little closer to Brisbane and started up there. Allan's band started in direct competition to the Blue Jeans and advertisements referring to Allan's band as "Alsation and his Hot Dogs" created enough interest among the locals to entice people to turn up on "horses, motorbikes and bikes", a crowd Allan was completely unprepared for.

*We weren't ready for a big crowd. What had happened, they had all heard about this strange looking band and had all left Chuck Supplice's dance and come up to the Cannon Hill hall. They liked what they saw and Chuck got a bit shitty with us. We were getting the crowd and he wasn't (Allan Reed).*

New Year's Eve fell on a Tuesday in 1957 and so Dulcie was able to advertise a Rock 'n' Roll New Year with the Hucklebucks for December 31<sup>st</sup> 1957 (*Brisbane Telegraph* 31/12/57, p. 20). Interestingly, during November of 1957, the Railway Institute advertised a Gala Dance on Tuesday nights. There

was no mention of a band but patrons were advised that there would be "half hall for jiving, the other half ordinary dancing" (*Brisbane Telegraph* 12/11/57, p. 45). According to Burke (1983, p. 63), The Railway Institute was "long and thin and resembled an oversize Railway Station." In spite of its restrictions, it functioned well as a Dance Palais during the war years and continued to do so until the "rock set in" in March 1959 (p. 63). Its success was due in no small part to its location very near Brisbane's Central Railway Station. There was nothing glamorous about the location or structure, it just happened to be in the right place at the right time.

By March 1958, most of Brisbane's rock 'n' roll dances were being supplied with music either by the Hucklebucks or the Blue Jeans. Dulcie had employed the Blue Jeans for her Monday night Deshon Street dances while the Hucklebucks began an association with the Tugun Surf Club by playing in their aid at the West End School of Arts, Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> of March being the first night advertised. The 6 Blue Jeans had been employed to perform at Cloudland on Tuesday evenings with compere Dick Swift. A typical week in March 1958 saw the two bands playing as follows:

Monday:	<b>Hucklebucks</b> at the West End School of Arts for the Tugun Surf Club.  The <b>Blue Jeans</b> at Deshon Street for Dulcie.
Tuesday:	The <b>6 Blue Jeans</b> at Cloudland.  The <b>Hucklebucks</b> at Cloudland.
Wednesday:	The <b>Blue Jeans</b> at the Windsor School of Arts.
Friday:	The <b>Blue Jeans</b> at Cannon Hill.
Saturday:	The <b>6 Blue Jeans</b> at Cloudland, "rock 'n' roll from 2 to 5, afternoon tea and hotdogs available".  The <b>Hucklebucks</b> at the Riverside Ballroom for a "Dulcie Day Modern Jive".

**Table 1** A Brisbane rock 'n' roll week in March 1958

The Riverside Ballroom was built as a:

*U.S.A. Naval Officers Club at Oxlade Drive, New Farm. There was not any attempt at architectural beauty. The construction consisted of the war expedience hypothesis of igloo style. There were two half round roofed buildings. One was for dancing and the other was for grogging and storage (Burke 1983, p. 47).*

After the cessation of hostilities, the dance hall was donated to the Limbless Soldiers' Association of Queensland through a long-term agreement with the City Council. Burke gave the building its name, "The Riverside Ballroom", and led the band there for many years, until its closing as a Palais in 1958. During that time, large amounts of money were raised for the Limbless association. Tom Day thought highly of the Riverside - "That's down on the river at New Farm. Beautiful hall that one, Returned Soldiers".

In April of 1958, rock 'n' roll extended into the western suburbs of Brisbane with the opening of the Hottentots at the Bardon RSL Hall (tram stop 24) on a Wednesday night and the Blue Jeans at the Mitchelton RSL Hall, also on a Wednesday night. Ipswich also entered the rock 'n' roll scene with the opening of one of the very influential Brisbane bands of this era, the Dominoes. According to Nowara and Spencer (1995, p. 6), the members of this band, which lasted from 1957 to 1960 were as follows:

- Len Austin (Sax)
- Alan Campbell (Drums)
- Bill Penrose (Sax)
- Bobby Dean (Vocals)
- Gerry Troughton (Bass)
- Dave Harris (Guitar)

Alan Campbell, on the sleeve of a recording done by the Dominoes at 4BH studios in October 1959, notes that the line up at that point was as follows:

- Gerry Troughton (Lead Guitar)
- Alan Campbell (Drums)
- Bobby Dean (Vocals)
- Derek Harris (Bass/Rhythm Guitar)
- Len Austin (Sax)

It is generally accepted that Gerry Troughton was the lead guitarist of the group and had a reputation as a fine guitarist. The Troughton name was to have a significant influence on popular music in Brisbane in the next ten years, particularly in relation to Tony, father of Gerry and builder of VASE range of amplifiers.

Newmarket (tram stop 14) opened up in April 1958 with another new band called the Zephys. The Hucklebucks connection with the Tugun Lifesavers moved to the Gold Coast on the first weekend of May 1958 with a midnight to dawn rock 'n' roll dance held at the Currumbin RSL. And by that time, the Hucklebucks had also moved further a field by opening a dance in the Sandgate Town Hall, northeast of Brisbane, on the coast. In May of 1958, another band appeared for the first time in the newspaper advertisements - the Gold Tones. While there had been advertisements for dances at the Mt Gravatt RSL Hall a number of times earlier in the year, no band had been mentioned.

In his book *A Drummer's Story: The More Things Change, The More They Stay the Same* (Gilmore 1995), Denis Gilmore talks about his brother Jack running dances at the Mt Gravatt RSL Hall in 1956. These dances consisted of foxtrots, waltzes and quicksteps done to records played on a "Philips Carnegie Hall Hi Fi sound system ... one of the very few ever bought into Australia" (p. 6). Aileen and John McCourt reported their experiences at the Mt Gravatt Memorial Hall at approximately the same time. Because of the improved sound quality available from the machine, people would come not so much to learn to dance from us but just to hear the music through this big set. It was a big box with 4 speakers on the stage and 2 that could go out into the hall. John used to run them out into the hall, making sure that all the wires had to be the same length. When a band first came to their hall, John was keen to ensure that they didn't run any of their equipment through it. While the Carnegie Hall Hi Fi set may have been rare, there were a number of them in Brisbane. The McCourts knew

of several other such sets privately owned and when their time at the Mt Gravatt club had finished, they had no trouble finding someone else to take over the hire purchase payments on the unit.

According to Gilmore, the Gold Tones were formed in 1957 by his brother Jack and consisted of Mike (?) on rhythm guitar, Tommy Mullins on lead guitar, Lindsay (?) on drums and Jack on lead vocals (Gilmore 1995, p. 6). He suggests that by the end of 1957, the Gold Tones were one of Brisbane's top bands, having backed Johnny O'Keefe at Cloudland. If advertisements in *The Brisbane Telegraph* can be used as a guide, Gilmore is probably a year out in his calculations. Neither JOK nor the Gold Tones had been advertised to perform at Cloudland by the end of 1957. By the end of 1958 though, the Gold Tones had a regular Tuesday night job at Cloudland with the Dominoes.

A typical week of Brisbane rock 'n' roll in May (12<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup>) 1958 was, according to *Brisbane Telegraph* advertisements, as follows:

Monday:	The <b>Gold Tones</b> at Mt Gravatt RSL Hall
Tuesday:	The <b>6 Blue Jeans</b> at Cloudland. The <b>Hucklebucks</b> at the Sandgate Town Hall
Wednesday:	The <b>Blue Jeans</b> at the Windsor School of Arts.
Friday:	The <b>Blue Jeans</b> at Cannon Hill.
Saturday:	The <b>Hucklebucks</b> at the Bardon RSL The <b>Zephys</b> at Newmarket The <b>Dominoes</b> at Nundah Memorial Hall

**Table 2** A Brisbane rock 'n' roll week in May 1958

Towards the end of May 1958, things must have been looking up for Tuesday nights at Cloudland because two bands were being advertised, each with six members - relatively large bands. New bands started appearing in the advertisements more regularly at around this time. The first advertisement featuring the Wild Ones appeared in *The Brisbane Telegraph* (p. 33) on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1958 for a dance in the Sandgate Town Hall. At around about the same time, Dulcie started Tuesday night dances at the South Brisbane Town Hall, featuring the Hucklebucks. Interestingly, she was still promoting jive. According to a brochure advertising the night as a "Dulcie Day Dance", June 3<sup>rd</sup> was the opening night for modern jive with "music by the Fabulous Hucklebucks jive band" and there would be a cash prize for the winner of the "knockout jive competition". Tom Day remembers these brochures - "... she'd buy brochures

and I'd have to go and put them out. That would be say at high schools. Another function, out would go the little flyers."

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> of June, potential patrons were advised that there were US ships in port and that all sailors were welcome to rock 'n' roll with the Blue Jeans at the Nundah Memorial Hall. The Hucklebucks struck up a working relationship with the Queensland Judo Club in June of '58 playing first for QJC members on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> of June. On Friday August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1958, the Judo Club advertised rock 'n' roll on Friday, Saturday and Sunday with music by the Wild Ones. Betty McQuade remembers that the Judo Club in the Valley used to be referred to as the "Blood Bath" a name probably closely associated not only with rough nature of the dance but also with the rough reputation that the Valley had in those days. Sunday afternoon at the Judo Club was always packed probably because it was the only place in Brisbane where a dance was run on Sunday afternoon. It was Saturday afternoon at Cloudland and Sunday afternoon at the Judo Club.

The Gene Steele Trio worked with the Hucklebucks at the South Brisbane Library Hall in June and in the same month, the Blue Jeans and the Dominoes were joined by a group of lifesavers who gave a demonstration at one of the regular Tuesday nights at Cloudland. Gene Steele and his Black Slacks opened up the Marquee Hall at Holland Park in June. Towards the end of the month, Cloudland advertised the Red Devils from Sydney to work with the Blue Jeans and the Dominoes for a Tuesday night dance.

The Strathpine Shire Hall was the venue for Blackjacks featuring Nev Finlay, promoted as Queensland's Little Richard (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 01/07/58, p. 32). The Red Caps first advertised dance was at the Ashgrove RSL Hall on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1958. According to Alan Campbell, the Red Caps in these early days consisted of Alan on drums, Len Austin on saxophone, Len's brother on double bass and Mike Casey on guitar. Both Len and Alan were still going to Brisbane State High School. The advertisements included the fact that the Ashgrove RSL could be found at or near tram stop 17. It was important to include the tram stop number in any advertising, "very important in those days because trams were the thing" (Alan Campbell 4.1).

The last weekend in July 1958 was an interesting one, especially with regard to the guest artist at Cloudland on Tuesday night.

Monday:	The <b>Gold Tones</b> at Mt Gravatt RSL Hall The <b>Wild Ones</b> at Deshon Street (Jive)
Tuesday:	A rock 'n' roll special with The <b>Blue Jeans</b> and the <b>Dominoes</b> at Cloudland plus <b>Barry Crocker</b>
Wednesday:	The <b>Red Caps</b> at the Ashgrove RSL Hall
Friday:	The <b>Wild Ones</b> at Nundah Memorial Hall in aid of Norths BBC

**Table 3** A Brisbane rock 'n' roll week in July 1958

On the Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> of August, the Red Devils were back in Brisbane with the Blue Jeans and the Dominoes for a rock 'n' roll 'bar-b-q' at Cloudland with an admission cost of 6/6. On the same day, The Wild Ones must have

performed a double shift. They were advertised as Peter Wilde and the Wild Ones for a job at the Queensland Judo Club as well as a midnight to dawn rock 'n' roll show at Nundah Memorial Hall in aid of the North's BBC. The mid-week midnight to dawn was made feasible by the annual Brisbane Exhibition holiday.

The Gold Tones advertised their regular Monday night dance at the Mt Gravatt RSL for the 18<sup>th</sup> of August and included reference to their winning the "Dick Fair Amateur Hour" (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 18/08/58, p. 29). Dennis Gilmore, in discussing his brother Jack, explains that period as follows:

*1958 arrived and The Gold Tones were by then, one of the top bands in Brisbane, and were in great demand all over South East Queensland, and because of that we hardly ever saw Jack. Of course Mum didn't like that. (You know what mothers are like). Some of the places they played at sometimes didn't need a whole band, so Jack and Mike formed a duo. They called themselves **The Ding Dongs**, but which one was 'Ding' and which one was 'Dong', I don't know. Jack said they got quite a lot of bookings, which bought in extra money, and even won a radio talent quest as The Ding Dongs (Gilmore 1995 p. 8).*

On Friday, August 22, 1958, there were four advertised rock 'n' roll dances in and around Brisbane. The Wild Ones were playing at the Queensland Judo Club, The Red Caps at the Nundah Memorial Hall, The Hucklebucks at the Baroona Hall and the Gold Tones at the Darra RSL. This is the first time an advertisement for the Darra RSL had been run in *The Telegraph*. Things must have been getting a little slow for the Hucklebucks at Baroona Hall since they advertised that "escorted ladies" would be allowed into the dance free. It was generally accepted that in order to get a crowd at a dance, there had to be a good number of girls present.

Cloudland continued with its tradition of bringing Sydney acts to Brisbane and on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, they advertised "The Rock-a-Billy Girl", direct from Sydney to perform with the Blue Jeans and the Dominoes. The following night, the Hucklebucks played at the O'Connor Boathouse, promoting jive with an admission cost of 4/-. Although the O'Connor Boathouse is well remembered by many who were teenagers at the time, it was advertised very little in *The Telegraph*. It seems it was a venue that generally played recordings rather than employ live musicians. The next week brought to an end a six-month, Tuesday night association between Cloudland and the Blue Jeans. From the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, the Gold Tones joined the Dominoes for the Tuesday night gig on the hill. The Blue Jeans were not advertised again in *The Telegraph*. It is reasonable to assume that they broke up at this point.

Gary Vize remembers the Blue Jeans breaking up and Chuck Supplice moving to Sydney and playing in a band which had a minor hit called 'Johnny Guitar'. Gary can't remember the name of the band but when the band came to Brisbane some time later he was advised that Chuck had gone to Spain to learn to play flamenco guitar. Gary had a past association of sorts with Chuck, both having learned guitar from the same teacher at the Hawaiian Club in Wooloongabba. "I can tell you that every one who played guitar in that early era learned to play off this guy at the Hawaiian Club and this Chuck Supplice was his star pupil and he always used to talk about Chuck" (Gary Vize).

Advertisements for rock 'n' roll in Brisbane for the first week in October read as follows:

Monday:	The <b>Gold Tones</b> at Mt Gravatt RSL Hall The <b>Wild Ones</b> at Nundah Memorial Hall
Tuesday:	The <b>Gold Tones</b> and the <b>Dominoes</b> at Cloudland.
Wednesday:	The <b>Wild Ones</b> at the Nundah Memorial Hall
Friday:	The <b>Hucklebucks</b> at Cannon Hill

**Table 4** A Brisbane rock 'n' roll week in October 1958

The regular dances continued in the months leading up to Christmas of 1958 with a couple of new venues coming on the scene. The Hucklebucks opened up two new sites, one that was advertised as "Tram stop 7 West End" and the other at the New Watersiders' Hall, each of which promoted jive. Max Blake was advertised as the compere at Cloudland on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1958 and a week later, patrons were invited to a "Guy Fawkes Rock 'n' Roll party", to rock around Guy from 9.30pm to 10.30pm (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 28/10/58 p. 41).

Brisbane bands being advertised in the Telegraph during 1958 included the Gold Tones, The Hucklebucks, The Blue Jeans, The Dominoes, The Wilde Ones, The Red Caps, The Zephys and The Thunderbirds. Among the venues being advertised were Mt Gravatt RSL Hall, Cloudland, Nundah Memorial Hall, Queensland Judo Club, Baroona Hall, Deshon Street, Bardon RSL, Library Hall South Brisbane, Cannon Hill, Ashgrove RSL, Strathpine Shire Hall, Sandgate Town Hall, Marquee Hall, Newmarket Hall, Windsor School of Arts, West End tramstop 7 (probably the AHEPA Hall), the Watersiders Hall

New year's eve saw the Dominoes playing at the Nundah Memorial Hall for a "New Years Eve Rock 'n' Roll Rally". Cloudland must have decided to extend the amount of rock 'n' roll they were offering starting on the first Friday of 1959. The Hucklebucks got the job and held it by themselves for a month before being joined by the Red Caps, an association that appeared to last for some time.

Alan Campbell kept an accurate diary of his band's activities. In the month of March 1959, according to the diary, the Dominoes played at the following venues.

Amt paid	Venue	Date	<b>BRISBANE TELEGRAPH</b>
£3/9/2	Cloudland	03/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Holland Park	04/04/59	✓
£3/0/0	Deshon Street	06/03/59	✓
£3/9/2	Cloudland	10/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Holland Park	10/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Deshon Street	13/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Cloudland	17/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Holland Park	18/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Deshon Street	20/03/59	✓
£3/14/9	Cloudland	24/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Holland Park	25/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	Deshon Street	26/03/59	✓
£3/0/0	RSL Burleigh Heads	28/03/59	
£4/0/0	RSL Burleigh Heads	29/03/59	
£3/9/2	Cloudland	31/03/59	✓

**Table 5** Alan Campbell's diary for March 1959.

The venues ticked in the right hand column were advertised in *The Brisbane Telegraph*. The column headed **Amt paid** shows how much Alan was paid for each job.

The end of March 1959 was Easter and the Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> Cloudland dance was advertised as a big Easter rock 'n' roll rally. Three bands, the Hucklebucks, the Gold Tones and the Dominoes were employed to help the celebrations. Patrons were promised some "harmonising numbers by the Damsna Twins". On the same day, the Milton Tennis Courts were put to "cultural" use with a Lee Gordon concert featuring Tommy Sands, The Platters, Frankie Avalon, The Sharks and Johnny Rebb and his Rebels. On Wednesday

25<sup>th</sup> of March 1959, the Hucklebucks advertised in *The Brisbane Telegraph* (p. 36) their Easter program at the Coast as follows:

Friday :	Midnight to dawn at the Currumbin RSL
Saturday:	8 - 12 at the Riverview Ballroom Coolangatta Breakfast session at the Playroom Cabaret
Sunday:	Midnight to dawn at the Currumbin RSL

**Table 6** Hucklebucks' Easter program, 1959

Easter 1959 also saw the opening of two new venues. The AHEPA Hall at West End was promoted with the Red Caps playing and Dulcie Day opened one of her more successful venues, the Railway Institute on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> of April with the Hucklebucks and the Damsina Twins. Lee Gordon used the Milton Tennis Courts for a program featuring Johnny Cash, Gene Vincent and Col Joye and the Joy Boys on Monday April 20<sup>th</sup>. During this month, the Red Caps were advertised a couple of times as playing at the Kenmore Theatre (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 29/04/59, p. 56) and while the regular dances continued for the month and beyond, probably the most significant change for 1959 was the first advertisement for the Planets (*Brisbane Telegraph*, 22/05/59, p. 40) who would be playing at the Nundah Memorial Hall in aid of Norths BBC. The introduction of the Planets to the Brisbane rock 'n' roll scene, to a certain extent, is a watershed given the important influence they would have on Brisbane teenage entertainment over the next four or five years. It would seem reasonable then to complete this timeline in May 1959.

## The Authorities – A Different Perspective

As very little positive comment was, or has been written about the rock 'n' roll era or its Brisbane proponents, it would not be unreasonable for someone gathering information about the era from written sources such as books, newspapers and magazines to come to the belief that the fifties was a period when there was little if any positive interaction between teenagers and adults. And while the "generation gap" may have grown to uncomfortable proportions for many in authority at this time, the experiences of most of those who shared their memories with this project do not bear out that assumption. As will be seen below, three of the pillars of tradition in community, that is the family, the school and the church, played a vital role in the moulding of those young people who went on to be successful in the business of rock 'n' roll and many who were successful in other businesses and careers after their rock 'n' roll life. There is no question that, but for the support of their families, to a lesser extent their school, and to an even lesser extent the mainstream churches, many of the early young musicians would have found life in the fast lane of rock 'n' roll somewhat more difficult and less comfortable.

### ***Parents and Schools***

Undoubtedly, the two biggest influences on the lives of most young people are their parents and their school. **Alan Campbell** learned the fife at primary school, started playing the drum kit at a dance run by his father at Point Lookout and when the time came for him to purchase a new set of drums, his parents gave him a loan of £100 towards a Premier drum kit that cost him £267

in July 1958. When Alan joined the Red Caps, his first band, later that year, his father used his Ford 10 bread van to transport the whole band, including a double bass and its player, to gigs (Alan Campbell **4.0**). This all happened while Alan was still a student at Brisbane State High School where he played drums in that school's orchestra.

**Brian Gagen** started learning to play the saxophone when he was about six years old. His father, grandfather and great grandfather had all been musical so it was reasonable for him and his brother to follow in their footsteps. Initially they played and sang in school groups, performing the obligatory Catholic school repertoire prior to starting their first band when Brian was not quite sixteen years old (Brian Gagen **4.0**). His parents were very supportive of the music he was playing and purchased for him the instrument that he needed, a not inconsiderable commitment given the cost of saxophones. According to Brian, "... without all of our parents, not just my parents, without all of our parents making their homes available to us to practise, it wouldn't have happened because in the early days, there was no venue to practise at."

**Ron Carroll** started learning the violin because his grandfather, then a dentist and part time musician, played violin in the Symphony Orchestra. Ron learned violin for eleven years from Sister Mary Estelle at the Guardian Angel's Convent in Wynnum, progressing through the examination system in which he topped Queensland four years in a row. By the time he had started working as an apprentice fitter and welder, he was close to completing his letters. But his

interests had drifted to rock 'n' roll and with the good ear that he had nurtured over the years as a violin player, he was able to teach himself enough piano to join a rock 'n' roll band. Ron's parents were disappointed that he did not continue with the violin, but continued to support him as long as he was happy in what he was doing (Ron Carroll **4.2**).

**Len Austin** started learning fife at primary school, changed to violin for two years when he was ten years old and then to saxophone 2 years later. School guidance officers in those days administered IQ and other tests in order to provide primary school students with advice on what subjects they should take at high school. Len was advised that he should set his sights on going to university and that he was too intelligent to do anything with music. So he promptly forgot about the saxophone until an orchestra was formed while he was at Brisbane State High School, the same one to which Alan Campbell belonged. The orchestra was organised by a science teacher, had some saxophones, piano accordions, violins and drums and played "pretty crook" music. Len's interest in other musical styles was kindled by the extra-curricular happenings after orchestra rehearsals at school. "Sometimes after rehearsals, a couple of us, Alan Campbell and a couple of the piano accordion players used to jam around and the girls used to come in and they would be quite excited". His parents were supportive of his playing rock 'n' roll and because they were both very kind people, they were happy for him to play the kind of music he wanted to (Len Austin **4.0**).

**Rob Richards'** (see p. 318) parents bought him a drum kit because he spent so much time playing the knives and forks and spoons. He also played fife and other such things at Ashgrove Primary School. However, it was when he went to Brisbane Grammar School that he and some of his friends formed a band which included performers on piano, clarinet, saxophone and himself on drums. They played at various church socials and school dances (Rob Richards 4.0). Rob remembers that boys were encouraged to do that kind of thing at Grammar and that they were quite popular among the general school population as a result of their playing.

Rock 'n' roll dances were run as a business for the **Day** family. Amongst other expenses for each dance, there would be the band, a door person (often a woman friend of Dulcie's), policeman, advertising and hall rental. Dulcie would stand at the door giving out or retrieving pass outs, a very convenient way of getting to know many of the patrons personally. The canteen, often run by son Peter (when he was fifteen or sixteen years old), was not heavily stocked, selling mostly soft drinks, sometimes pies and cigarettes. Cigarettes, the Craven A brand, were occasionally distributed freely at the dances. In order for Dulcie to receive these free cigarettes, she had to agree to play a 'Craven A' advertising jingle supplied by the company (on a 45rpm record) just prior to distributing the cigarettes.

It was very important to pay the band union rates in those days since, according to Tom, the music industry was very heavily unionised. No such thing as offering the band a cut of the door as far as the union was concerned.

Dulcie's dances were not what could be considered to be hugely financially successful.

*Could you imagine, 3/- or 2/6 [entry]. No. Well at one stage it was but we would spend it on the next show. When you promote a show you gotta put money, you gotta spend money to advertise. Granted she would have made some money, particularly at the Railway Institute ...Her main objective was to run dances to be in dancing to be in the public eye, that was Dulce (Tom Day).*

As a parent, **Tom Day** encouraged his children to learn to play music and thought that it was important that they get a good grounding on their instrument, so in most cases, the children were sent to a recognised teacher, at least for six months. At one point, Tom had just finished building a bass guitar when his son Tom was given the opportunity to play bass in a band at the Gold Coast. Tom explains how he encouraged Tom (jnr) to learn to play bass in a very short time to allow him to take up the opportunity. Victor Sylvester recordings proved to be important in this process. Tom (snr) would allocate different dance styles and rhythms to be practised each evening. After a couple of weeks, Tom (jnr) reported for his job as bass player at Claude Carnell's Playroom, a job which he held for two years (Tom Day **4.0**).

Another of his sons was "tricked" into playing a saxophone in a band. It was the only time Tom ever lied to his family, but for Tom, the end justified the means. The family had bought a saxophone for their second son Darcy who was duly sent to a teacher to learn "properly". Darcy tired of learning traditional

music and gave up practising the instrument. Tom managed to encourage him back to practise by telling him a lie, something he still feels a little guilty about. He told him that someone had phoned, asking if one of the Day boys plays saxophone and whether he would like to be in a band. This was enough to get Darcy back practising again, as well as to purchase a baritone and a tenor sax. A band *The Trinity* was arranged and Darcy started playing at venues around Brisbane (Tom Day 4.1).

**Tony Worsely's** parents supported him in his musical pursuits not only by providing a place at their house in which Tony and his band could rehearse, they attended many of his performances. But they were not prepared for the price of Tony's fame after his hit records. Mrs Worsely explains the situation she and her husband found themselves in at Brisbane airport after going out to meet Tony on his return from Melbourne.

*When Tony came off the airplane one night, Dad and I went to meet him with the younger sister and all these teenagers were milling around and I said to Dad "There must be somebody important on this plane". We had only come to meet Tony and everybody got off the plane and no Tony and we thought well that's funny, all these girls are screaming and carrying on. Tony came to the top of the steps and the whole place broke into pandemonium. So that is why they were here and we couldn't even get near him to say hello. They just took him off and took him over. Molly Meldrum was with 'em when he was in his early years, he had just started. I went over to speak to Tony and Ivan Dayman said "He's not your son anymore, he belongs to me." I said to him that I would like Tony to come home with me and Ivan said, "Oh no, he's going to the swimming pool". He went up to the Olympic swimming pool up by the*

*Ekka there and we spent the day up there with him. But oh the teenagers... (Mrs Worsely).*

Mr and Mrs Worsely were not very happy about the situation.

*Well we were a bit upset but after we discussed it with Tony and Ivan, that the sort of thing you have to put up with, with Tony riding the crest of a wave like he was at that time. And then his Velvet Waters came out and that put him right on top of the list and he stayed on the top of the list for weeks and weeks and that was good. We had some wonderful times. I still enjoy it today as I did in the 60s (Mrs Worsely).*

### ***The Churches***

For the church, a similar situation existed in that a number of organisations saw the need to support young people through the type of entertainment with which they identified. The Catholic Church through its YCW had an ongoing tradition of dances which did not seem to have too much of a problem with crossing over into rock 'n' roll. David Cheales (see p. 309) and his band, *Jim Diamond and the Lancers*, started at the Rosalie YCW dances and as their band developed so did their association with YCW dances around Brisbane until they were playing at YCW dances every Friday and Sunday evening. It is interesting that YCW dances flourished on a Sunday evening at a time when Sunday entertainment in commercial venues in Brisbane was still banned.

Nick Rolfe (see p. 319) and his band the Rhythm Rockers played mostly for YCW dances in the late 1950s and by 1961, were playing regularly at thirteen YCW dances per month. In 1959, each member of the band was being

paid £1/5/0 for a night's playing at a YCW dance, a sum that they felt was quite reasonable. The St James dance at Cooparoo was the biggest YCW venue Nick's band played at, often attracting between five and seven hundred patrons. The Sunday night dances would start at 7.00pm and finish at around 10.00pm with most of the music played being rock 'n' roll. The band played forty-five minutes on with fifteen minutes off and there was often some old time included - gypsy taps and progressive barn dances – 60/40 dances. The YCW dances were designed to provide entertainment for young people and as such, no religion was preached.

A little later, the 64 Club was started in a hall at St Patrick's Anglican Church in the Valley. Ted Dunglison (see p. 311) was the Diocesan Youth Chaplin for Brisbane at the time and he had recently returned from a sojourn in London where he had worked in an East London venue called the 59 Club, a successful club for young people which boasted Princess Margaret as its President and Cliff Richard as a supporter. The 64 Club was run by a group of YAF members with Ted's support, and while there was no outward presentation of religion as far as the patrons were concerned, groups of YAF members used to spend time in the chapel in a prayer meeting during the evening.

Team members also made it their business to try to ensure that patrons enjoyed the evening – "it was felt that there would be shy boys or girls who would come and so these kids would get up and dance with them to get them up dancing". About five hundred patrons were attracted each Saturday night with the program starting at around 7.30pm and finishing at 11.30.

For Ted there was general support, but there were members of parishes around Brisbane and other clergy who felt that all was not right - "What the hell do they think they are doing" and "This is going too far down the track of popularity" and "We don't need this sort of thing for our kids" but generally, the venture was supported (Ted Dunglison **4.0**)

As a teenager in the mid fifties, Noel Preston (see p. 317) and his family lived in the inner city suburb of West End. His father, Rev Arthur Preston, was the Superintendent at the West End Methodist Mission, a church that was well known across Brisbane for its outreach activities both within and without the church. At a time when bodgies and widgies were becoming more visible in their community, the question was asked, "How can we provide appropriate entertainment for the young people ... [at a time when] options for young people were more than the previous generations?"

The Church was already running "Poobah Parties" once a month but these proved to be too tame to reach young people who were right outside the church. So a plan was devised, under the leadership of Rev Arthur Preston to run Teenage Cabarets to attract "young people who were looking for what some may regard as more risqué form of entertainment" (Noel Preston).

The outcome in 1958 was a series of dances in the church hall that were organised around the performance of a regular rock 'n' roll band. A big difference between these shows and the other church functions already discussed was that the evening normally finished with a 'floorshow' that

consisted of some quieter music with a suitable message to lead into a devotional presentation by a guest speaker, most often, Rev Arthur Preston who, according to Noel, “spoke to them in a down to earth manner about the challenge of Christ to young people”. Noel, who was closely involved with the organisation and promotion of Teenage Cabarets, explained that behind-the-scenes organisation such as advertising, bouncers, selling of food and drink as well as the prayer meetings that occurred in the church for the whole evening were organised and managed by a committee of young church members (Noel Preston **4.0**).

It is very interesting that all of this happened at a time when “there would have been whole sections of the Methodist community that were hostile to dancing itself, let alone the jungle rhythms of rock ‘n’ roll”. According to Noel, Teenage Cabaret was possible because his:

*... father was skilful in using community interest groups to support his activities – The Courier Mail, he became very friendly with the editor of The Courier Mail, the local Rotary groups, so any opposition had to deal with the fact that this wasn’t a maverick isolated initiative, this was part of a well accepted agenda in the community.*

So successful did these Teenage Cabarets become that the idea was taken up in a number of other Methodist Church Communities in Australia, most notably in Sydney, Newcastle and the Gold Coast. Rev Arthur Preston best describes what made the functions as different to what else was being offered by churches in Brisbane at the time or in the future.

*It is my earnest hope and prayer that Teenage Cabaret will remain an instrument of evangelism and will never become just another form of entertainment bereft of its missionary purpose (Preston 1960, p. 41).*

## Conclusion

Rock 'n' roll entertainment in Brisbane grew from its birth to its "teenage" years primarily because it comprised new music played by new bands at new venues in the suburbs. In searching for and finding relative freedom in the suburban halls of Brisbane, its growth to maturity identified musicians and promoters who were successful not only because of their innovative temperament but also because they were fortunate enough to have a network of family and sometimes community support. The fact that the established venues were not necessarily available to them did not mean that they could not share their music. Parents, schools, churches and even the RSL, for one reason or another combined to support this new enterprise, and in spite of a few small problems, some of which will be discussed in the next chapter, that support was warranted. The change did not suit everybody, especially those musicians who had the misfortune to find themselves out of work as a result of the new trends. Jim Burke was far from impressed. For him, "the rock had [well and truly] set in" (Burke 1983, p. 63).

## Chapter 5

### The Equipment

#### Introduction

"Changes in technology are having a profound impact on Australian music: how it is composed, performed, recorded, produced, marketed, distributed and ultimately, how it is heard" (Volker and Holmes 1996, p. 6). At no time in recent history has this been more evident than in the changes associated with popular music of the 1950s especially in relation to the equipment needed make that music. The tools of the Brisbane rock 'n' roll trade were the electric guitar, the bass guitar, the amplifier, the PA system and the drums. While the drums were relatively well developed and easily procurable prior to 1957, the electric and bass guitars, their associated amplifiers and PA systems were as much in their infancy as was rock 'n' roll. So for Brisbane rock 'n' roll's growth to proceed, its tools of trade had to develop accordingly.

Not only did some of the early musicians have to learn to play their instruments in difficult and often restrictive circumstances, many had to build their own equipment. As the rock 'n' roll movement matured however, specialisation became the key. Musicians could buy their equipment ready made to a very high standard from American, Japanese and Australian factories and so spend their time, energy and money on learning to play them well. At the

same time, some Brisbane entrepreneurs began to concentrate on the other aspects of the music industry, aspects such as manufacture, retailing and promotion. This chapter will demonstrate this trend by documenting the Brisbane rock 'n' roll equipment story as told by some of the people who had direct involvement with it.

### **The Brisbane Scene**

Brisbane rock 'n' roll musicians of the mid 1950s lived in relative isolation as far as the new music technology was concerned. As the piano lost its exalted position as king of musical instruments (Roell 1989), aided and abetted by the new economic and technological order associated with the post-war consumer era, some sections of the Brisbane community were less than impressed. While not all music stores adopted the new trends, for those that did, the guitar and the technology associated with rock 'n' roll gradually took the place of the piano as their major sales item (for a discussion on the changing social role of the piano, see McSwain 1995). One Brisbane man and his music store exemplify this change from the retailing perspective.

### **Ron Cleghorn**

Ron Cleghorn was born in 1937 and was 13 when he began working in the music industry. He started as an apprentice piano repairer, an apprenticeship that required five years of training.

*[I] got into the music store which was the Nundah Music Centre... in Station Road, Nundah, just around the corner from the Nundah Hotel on a little street that runs down to the station ... when I was about 20, 21.*

*So this about 1957, give or take a year or so. When I first started off [the records were] 78s then they changed over to the 45s. I remember the first record where I was buying half and half was Johnny Mathis' White Sports Coat. We bought half 78s and half 45s. Then all the 78s disappeared and the 45s took over. The record companies used to come out and do your whole shop up for nothing. They would send a window dresser out if it was a new release and they would extensively use display people and our shops to market their product (Ron Cleghorn 5.0).*

In the mid-1950s, music sales in Brisbane were mostly the province of four major retailers in the city - King and Kings, Palings, Grice's and Carnegies. There were few other outlets in the suburbs; the only one Ron could think of was Drouyn and Drouyn, makers of Drouyn and Dandy drums, at Stones Corner. (Ron Cleghorn 5.1) When Ron took his store over, Nundah Music Centre was basically a music shop selling pianos, pianolas, pianola roles and some sheet music. Initially, as well as records, Ron put in a few acoustic guitars but the electrics soon became the big sellers.

*I finished being the suburban music centre of Queensland. We were the main Fender agents in those years. So it was pretty exciting times because these were new things, bass guitars, tremelos, reverbs, all those sort of things ... It all happened very quickly. There was an explosion of electric guitars, bass guitars. In bass guitars, there were basically a few Japanese Star solid body guitars came on the market first, then a few Hofner German acoustic basses but there were no real amplifiers. Everybody experimented with speakers and they would blow speakers all the time. It was a real time of learning (Ron Cleghorn 5.2).*

For Ron as a businessman, it was important to stay up to date with what was happening in the music industry. To do this he had to travel to conventions in Sydney and Melbourne, a significant cost to his small business.

*I always had something new. I used to travel. They were the first days of conventions in Sydney and Melbourne and I would go to them. They would cost a fair amount of money but whenever there was something new, I'd have it first. Whether it was a new style of drum stick, a new guitar string, a new FX pedal, a new brand of guitar, a new amplifier, I always liked to be first to get it. In those days, I was a young guy and there was a lot of elderly guys who thought that the electric guitar would never take off. They still wanted to play acoustic so I had a very open mind on the electric guitar. But many of the older guys in the industry thought that the electric guitars would never happen (Ron Cleghorn 5.3).*

Technological developments in the late 1950s led to exciting times for musicians, music store owners and employees and in Ron's store, most of the excitement was generated by having the latest equipment available.

*... they used to come into the shop and particularly of a Saturday morning. We used to close the shop say at 11.30 but then for the next couple of hours there could be a jam session. Guys would come in and try things out ... it just sort of self-generated because it was such an exciting time. Kids wanted to play guitars. As I said, people would come for miles just to see a Fender in those days. So it was a self-generating thing (Ron Cleghorn 5.4).*

Lester Vichary (see p. 320) was an employee of the Nundah Music Centre and remembers promoting the new equipment by example.

*We use to play in Nundah Music Centre every Saturday morning - like who ever was there. You'd get two guitars and a drummer and you'd play tunes either out in front of the shop or in the window of the shop. As FBI or Apache came out, you'd be at home learning it the night before and you'd go down and play it at Nundah. This guy used to come in every Saturday morning and buy records and one Saturday he said "I'd love to be in a band. What can I buy to be in a band?" We didn't have a bass so I said "Buy a bass guitar and I'll show you how to play it." So he bought this bass guitar and he was hopeless, he just couldn't learn; he was cross-eyed into the bargain. And he used to stand on the stage and we would say "Don't you turn that on. You'll put us off." (Lester Vickary).*

Because of the interest shown in the Fender brand name, one of the more successful dealerships that the Nundah Music Centre promoted was for this brand of instruments.

*I got [Fender] through the Australian agent called J Stanley Johnston in Sydney. He was the Australian agent. People would travel miles in those days just to see a Fender guitar or amplifier, just to touch it ... We had Stratocasters, Jazzmasters, Precision basses, Jazz basses. Then we had Showman amps, Concert amps, Prelude amps. The first amplifiers that ever came in were 112 volts out of America and they had to put transformers in the bottom of the amp (Ron Cleghorn **5.5**).*

Lester Vickary used to enjoy road testing the Fender merchandise.

*... We all saw the Shadows and somehow we found out about Fender amps. ... The Nundah Music Centre was the first place to have the Fender amps and the first amp that he got was a Concert amp ... I used to take it up to the hall and try it out. We used to play up at the Nundah*

*Hall, which was only 100 yards from the shop, and I'd go into the shop and take the amp out and go and try it and put it back in the shop after the dance. And then I liked it that much that I bought it and then everybody from then on bought Concert amps because that was the biggest amp you could buy ... A Fender Stratocaster was £104. They used to range from about £101 to £104 and then if you wanted a special colour done in America it would be about £115 (Lester Vickary).*

All was not as it seemed for some people who purchased a Fender Guitar in the early days however.

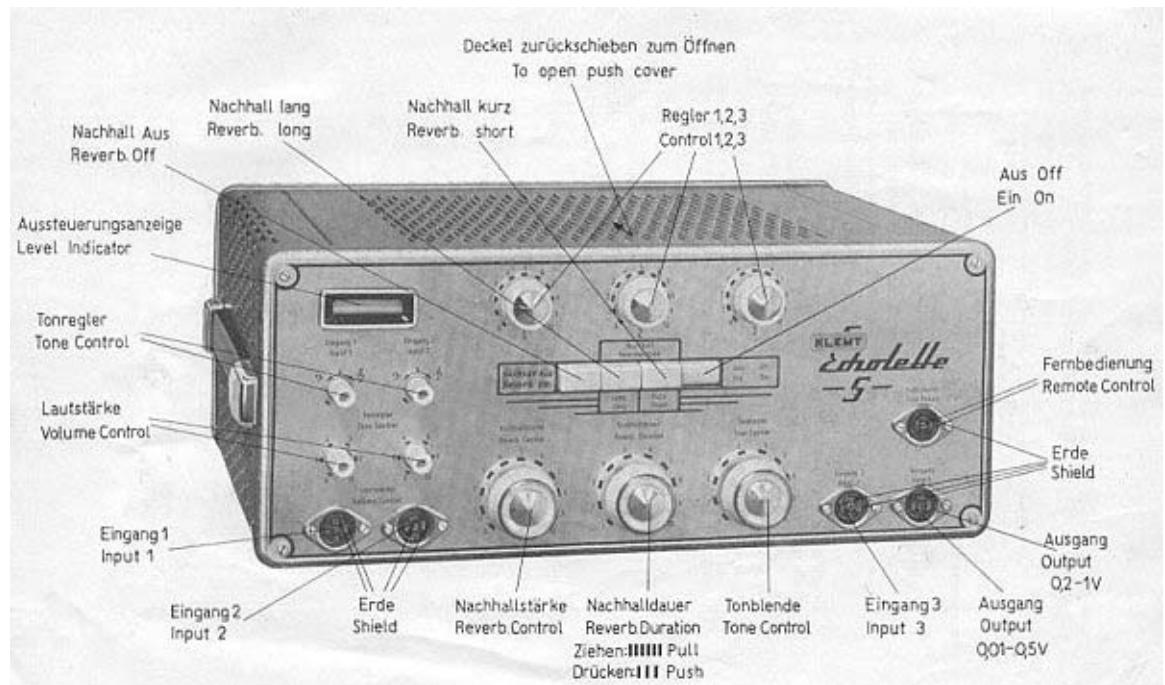
*But what we used to do. If someone wanted a special colour, I just used to take it down to the local spray panel beaters to do it, down at Nundah. I'd scrape all the paint off and take it down to them and I'd come back with a beautiful flamingo red, just arrived from America. We would strip all the paint off with paint stripper. Ron Cleghorn used to jump up and down - "Have you finished that guitar yet?" (Lester Vickary).*

There was obviously a large number of satisfied clients however because Ron went on to develop and own a thriving business. One of the important pieces of after market equipment he remembers selling was the Bigsby Tremolo Arm. Paul Bigsby, one of the originators of the solid body electric guitar, built his first example for Merle Travis in 1947 at about the same time as Les Paul was building his first solid body electric guitar (Minhinnett and Young 1999, p.14). This was at a time when tremolo was an exciting addition for many electric guitarists and the first and best tremolo arm to come on the market was from Bigsby. It was available to suit acoustic, F hole and solid body guitars. Ron remembers that a Bigsby tremolo arm was made of aluminium, added a new

dimension to the sound available from the guitar and cost £27 (Ron Cleghorn **5.6**).

Effects pedals and then distortion became available. Ron could never understand why guitarists would buy these units to add to a “beautiful amplifier, clean as a whistle and then all they wanted to do is get a distortion sound as if it was overloaded. But that was the sound that came up in those days” (Ron Cleghorn).

The Echolette was one of the first effects units to become widely recognised and used and as can be seen from the photo below, it was German in origin. It was based on the technology of a tape recorder and created its echo effect by way of an endless loop of tape, a record head and a number of playback heads. It is clear from the graphic that short and long reverb was part of its arsenal of effects. Ron remembers vividly receiving of his first Echolette which was hand delivered by J Stanley Johnston. “J Stanley was a little elderly guy and I remember he bought it up to me at Nundah. He arrived in a taxi with an Echolette for us to try because we had a lot of interest from all the guitarists” (Ron Cleghorn). Nobody knew how to work it so Ron and Garry, a guitar teacher who worked for Nundah Music, spend much of the first night twiddling knobs to get “this unbelievable repeat sound off the endless tape”. Although Ron had one of the first examples of the Echolette in Australia, it was not a big seller for him, probably because of its cost. At the time it cost well over £200 and was outsold by an English equivalent called the Copycat that sold for something like £79 (Ron Cleghorn **5.7**).



**Illustration 4:** From the Echolette manual, supplied by Allan Campbell

Since the Shadows used an Echolette, so should the Alan Campbell's band the Echoes and it was to Ron Cleghorn at Nundah Music Centre, who had supplied all of Alan's guitar equipment in the past, to whom he turned to supply that piece of equipment. On receiving his unit and deciphering the German directions, Alan set it up to be able to take input from both the electric guitars in the band as well as the vocals. "We wanted to use this echo unit for guitars to go in and voice because we wanted to change the whole style." (Alan Campbell). The output from the Echolette was then sent to two Fender Concert amplifiers, one placed each side of the stage as well as the PA amplifier.

As far as guitars go, Ron remembers that there were a lot of Japanese electrics that came into the country but Star was the brand that sold best initially.

*There was a lot of [Japanese electric] Star guitars came out at the time. They were probably the first solid body guitars that guys bought. Not so much in amplifiers but solid body guitars. They sold for about £50. The [quality was] OK. No real problems. In the early days we got the warped necks and things with guitars where the technology wasn't as advanced as it is today and the adjustments weren't the same. But overall it was pretty good.*

*[Our biggest selling instrument line was] guitars by far ... Yamaha bought out a G50 acoustic guitar on the market; I think it was, with a fairly thick neck. We sold hundreds of them. A lot of people got to guitars through the Yamaha guitars and the Yamaha instruments. They came later, they didn't come earlier but they were a fantastic product*  
(Ron Cleghorn **5.8**).

Nundah Music Centre's most famous customers were probably the brothers Gibb through an association that started and ended well before they became the Bee Gees. Ron thinks that he probably sold them their first guitar. At the time, the Gibb family was living at Cribb Island, an area that no longer exists because of expansion to the Brisbane Airport. The boys used to come into his shop on their way home from school with their school bags over their shoulder. Ron remembers their father working for a company called Nobles who were the first agent for Victa motor mowers when they were released.

As a venue for supplying the tools of the trade to rock 'n' roll musicians, The Nundah Music Centre had no peers in Brisbane and in fact grew to be one of the most successful music franchises in Australia. Ron eventually sold the business to Barry Bull (2001), himself a former rock musician in the early Brisbane scene. Darryl Wright, as a member of the (second) Domines, remembers that Nundah Music Centre was the place to buy anything to do with music in the early days.

*I guess in the days of the Dominoes when we were at Nundah Memorial Hall, the rhythm guitarist in the Dominoes, a fellow called Lester Vichary, was employed at the Nundah Music Centre run by Ron Cleghorn. The Nundah Music Centre was eventually sold to a guy called Barry Bull who bought the business and today is called Toombul Music which is one of the biggest recording and electronic and hi-fi supply houses in Brisbane. Nundah Music Centre was the place you buy your sheet music. He was bringing in all the Fender guitars. In fact, Tony Heathcote, our lead guitarist, got one of the early Stratocasters. So did Lester Vickary. Our bass player, Lew Noyes got one of the first Fender Precision basses, which he still has today, it's a 1959 model. It's an absolute collector's item. We were not only one of the early bands in Brisbane but we had the best-looking guitars. You just had to buy them in whatever colours they were available in. That didn't stop us. The 3 guitars that we had were a sunburst, an off white and a sunburst bass guitar. We wanted them all the same colour so we took them down to the paint shop and pulled them apart, rubbed them down and turned them into red and white guitars. That's what the Shadows had so we had to have red and white Fender guitars which all matched each other on stage (Darryl Wright **5.0**).*

## Home-made

The availability or otherwise in music stores of the required equipment for this new music called rock 'n' roll is only part of the story. While there were some who could buy their equipment, there were others who could not, either because they couldn't afford to or because the equipment was not available. Dooley MacDonnell has an electric steel guitar that was made during the late 1930s.

*The bloke that made that was in the foundry - Toowoomba foundry. In the woodworking business, there's a carpenter, then a cabinetmaker and then there is a pattern maker who was the top bloke. He makes the patterns if they are going to put out some new work in the foundry. The pattern maker made the body of that. Solid wood. When they got the electronics book from America that showed this electric guitar, they thought they had to make the body the same size as an acoustic guitar. That was the size of the Hawaiian box guitar that they used to play. So he made that the same and that is solid timber. That's why it's got such a lovely resonance in it, even though the pickup's down a bit because the magnets need re-flashing. That's why it's so heavy; its solid body is 3 inches thick.*

*The [pickup] unit was made in the Toowoomba foundry. That would have been wound by one of the electricians ... Then the lead player who used to play for the Hawaiians, he was a spray painter, sprayed all the engines. He sprayed all this. It still plays OK. It would be a shame to take that unit out but one day I'll like to take it out, if I could get it out, and get the magnets re-flashed. That would have been made in the mid 1930s, 36/37/38 probably. The neck was made by the pattern maker. He set the pearls and the frets in, he would have done all that (Dooley MacDonnell **5.0**).*

As a pedal steel guitar player, Dooley built a guitar for himself in the mid 1950s. It was a six stringed instrument with a pickup made by Alan Schneider who was a brother of the Schneider Sisters. He was an electronics expert and was able to build electronics of a suitably high standard for Dooley to use on the Amateur Hour radio program. So he could stand up to play, he had a stand fabricated that featured a ploughshare as a base made by a local blacksmith. This was necessary because with the coming of rock 'n' roll, the trend was for band members to play standing up (Dooley MacDonnell **5.1**).

The number of slide steel guitars that were home made in the early days indicates the important influence that country music had on the early rock 'n' rollers. Allan Reed has a very old electric steel guitar that he treats with loving care. It was made in about 1945 by a PMG (Post Master General) employee who used what ever he could get his hands on to complete the task. The volume knob came from an old Kreisler radio while the stainless steel came from PMG stocks. The pickup was made from the mouthpiece of a PMG phone and the frets and the tuners were placed as for a standard guitar. The guitar is tuned to an A tuning (A major chord) and the instrument was used in Allan's bands right through his career. As well as playing rock 'n' roll, Allan maintained a country band called the Four Ranchers, a band that started before the rock 'n' roll days and in fact one that made more money for Allan than did his rock 'n' roll band. He remembers using this guitar when he visited Boggo Road jail on Saturday afternoons to perform for the prisoners prior to the days of rock 'n' roll.

"We'd take them cigarettes. We didn't smoke ourselves but we'd take them cigarettes, sneak them in" (Allan Reed **5.0**).

Tom Day was another one to build an instrument (or two) himself. His first effort was a steel guitar made for his son Peter. The guitar is still in working order.

*Peter, my second eldest son, I started him off. I said, "Pete, you want to get in a band?" He said, "I'd like to dad." He had no formal music so I said, "Right, I'll make you a guitar." So I made him a steel guitar. I've still got that one and I'll show it to you. I was gonna put that in the museum but I thought, Oh no I might give it to my grand kids (Tom Day **5.0**).*

A little later on another son, Tom (jnr), needed a bass guitar, so Tom (snr), decided to build him one.

*See that guitar, that's the one I made. That's in the museum. Here it is here. It was a Moody pickup. I had no idea [how to make it]. I made this thing when there was no such thing as a bass guitar. Nobody could tell me anything. Dulce said "Who the hell do you think you are Tom?" I said "Well I don't know but I'm gonna have a go at this thing" (Tom Day).*

Tom did have a go at it and made a bass guitar that proved a more than suitable instrument with which Tom (jnr) could learn and get a start. As has been mentioned above, Tom (jnr) worked for a couple of years at the Playroom in Currumbin with that instrument. Tom (snr) has since donated it to the Queensland museum.

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Lester Vickary had a close involvement with homemade (as well as the professionally made) instruments from his early days in the business.

*... somebody saw a photo of a bass. Like Tommy Day actually had one made and that's the one that Alan Campbell's got. He's got that old bass with the big thick neck that was the one that Tommy Day used to play and then Tommy's mother was owed a favour by Johnny O'Keefe so he sent up a real Fender bass so Tommy's was the first Fender bass that came from overseas. Johnny O'Keefe bought it over and then did the deal with Dulcie Day. That would have been easily 1959 or 1960. [Before then] there was these home made ones but no real Fenders. There could have been others that I didn't know of. Tony Troughton used to make them ... he made basses and guitars. He used to cure the wood in his rafters under the house and repair the amps on the bench and the wood was up curing in the rafters and then when anybody wanted a guitar he'd just take down whatever bit of wood he wanted and make the guitar.*

*I've got Bobby Deen's first electric guitar, the first electric guitar that Tony made. I've got that one at home and you could get a photo of that if you wanted it. That was made by Tony for a singer called Bobby Deen who was in probably the first band. When you say about the bass guitar, nobody could play the bass. We even hired a guy who wanted to hang on to a bass and just stand there, not even play, keep it turned off. So we let him go and buy an amp and a guitar and off he went (Lester Vickary).*

Johnny O'Keefe went to the United States to record "She's My Baby" in October 1959 (McFarlane 1999, p. 462) and again in February 1960 for a short promotional trip as the 'Boomerang Kid' (Renate 1998, p. 140). The exchange Lester mentioned probably occurred when JO'K toured in Queensland with Lonnie Lee in the middle of 1960. It was while returning to Sydney from

Queensland on June 27<sup>th</sup> to do his TV show "Six O'clock Rock" that he had an accident that caused him serious injury and put him out of action for six weeks (McFarlane 1999, p, 462).

The unavailability of bass guitars and players provided the impetus for many members of bands to either learn how to build or how to play them. When Alan Campbell first joined the Red Caps in 1958, the bass end was provided by a "bass fiddle". While international bands such as Bill Haley and the Comets used one, there were a couple of limiting factors with regards to the double bass, the most obvious being its large size. The second and most important limitation as far as rock 'n' roll was concerned was its lack of volume and as the guitar amplifiers became louder, so did the lack of volume increase as a limitation. Many of the early Brisbane bands started off without a bass player but by 1959, a bass guitar was seen in most of the top bands. The Dominoes, for instance, recorded a number of songs at 4BH studios in October 1959 with Derek Harris on bass guitar.

Allan Reed and his re-vamped band, the Hucklebucks, saw it as important that they kept up with what was happening in the music equipment world. A change of line-up in mid 1959 introduced Peter and Dave Burroughs to the band and a complementary necessity for a bass guitar.

*... we still didn't have the sound we wanted. Peter Burroughs and his brother were both very good craftsmen in wood. Dave went scrounging through the Sandgate dump and came across an old piano. He took it home and he took the strings out and he cut out a piece of wood from the*

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*leg of this piano. He made the arm and guitar out of the wood of this piano and he made it into an electric bass. He used the PMG telephone box, ripped out the mouthpiece and made what they called a "humbucking" pickup sound. We weren't very popular with PMG - the little pickup [came from a phone mouthpiece]. He got that and hitched it up and got the 4 string bass. We kept it quiet. We didn't let the opposition know. The bands were starting to come up and were becoming very good and they were catching us and they were lots younger than what we were. We were sitting on our perch quite comfortably but they were getting up. So we had to go along (Allan Reed 5.1).*



**Illustration 5:** Dave Burroughs (Huck Berry and the Hucklebucks) plays his home-made bass guitar on the Coca Cola Hi Fi Club TV program.

For a short time in the late 1950s, home made guitars and bass guitars were a relatively common sight. But the guitar is only half of the duopoly required to play that instrument in a rock 'n' roll band. Amplifiers caused no end of consternation for the early players as Allan Reed found out during one of his first gigs as a rock 'n' roll artist. Most of the amplifiers were either home made or modified from some other electrical equipment. And the pyrotechnics didn't

cease for Allan with the first job. Len Austin remembers playing with Huck Berry and the Hucklebucks.

*Actually, my job in those days was to mind the amplifiers which were made by a guy called Schneider at Sandgate. It used to catch fire occasionally so we kept a gunny sack, hessian ... My job was, when I saw it catching fire was to put a damp cloth over the whole thing and stop it from burning up. That was at a place called Jack Busteed's Dance Studio.*

Allan tells of how, towards the end of the 1950, competition from up and coming bands caused the members of the Hucklebucks to work hard on developing new and improved sounds. He credits the Dominoes of the time as a terrific band and the members as fine musicians in contrast to the members of his own band, none of whom could read music and who "just lived by our instincts".

As a band, Huck Berry and the Hucklebucks were keen to develop what Allan referred to as a "high pitched sound", a sound that they had heard on record but had been unable to work out how it was achieved since they did not know about tweeters and woofers and such things. Peter and David Burroughs solved their problem with the help of the shells of eggs. After removing the contents of an egg by drilling a hole in each end and placing the egg on an ant heap to have the ants clean it out, the shells were cut in half by another member of the group who was a jeweller. A half-eggshell was glued to the speaker from a Kreisler radio using what was then a new type of glue called *Tarzan's Grip* and

the speaker was connected to the amplifier by copper wire, presumably to create what would be considered today to be a tweeter. To create a woofer for the bass guitar, they used an emu egg.

Allan remembers that at the time the Hucklebucks and the Dominoes were playing at Cloudland and the plan was to give these other bands a “bit of a shake up”. As was their wont at each such gig, a coin was tossed to see which band went on first. This particular time it turned out to be the Hucklebucks’ opportunity to commence the evening’s proceedings. They started off with *Shake Rattle and Roll* and *Hippy Hippy Shake* and produced this “lovely big sound, big booming bass. They couldn’t get over it because nobody had a bass, nobody had a bass player.” Hans Apel (owner of Cloudland) and his son both came out on to the floor to look and listen while the crowd froze.

*“You can just imagine the sound. It was unheard of, this glorious big bass coming through and my lead guitar screaming out there and we were really whacking it out. The crowd just roared”* (Allan Read).

Allan credits this new sound with helping the Hucklebucks secure a position on the first rock ‘n’ roll television show in Brisbane. In 1960 there were about thirty bands in Brisbane and each one of them would have liked to have been selected for the Coca Cola Hi Fi Club that was to be compered by Johnny James. The Hucklebucks secured a six-month contract to supply the music for the program that was recorded at Channel 9 on Sunday mornings and broadcast on the following Saturday evening, just before the news.

Allan remembers when he took delivery of his first commercially built amplifier. During the Hucklebucks' time as resident band on the Hi Fi Club, the manager of King and Kings, the large music store in George Street, approached Allan advising him that the company was preparing to stock and sell the Fender Vibralux amplifier. The model was already being used in Sydney and the deal was that Allan was to promote the amplifier during his TV performances in return for a good deal on an amplifier. The good deal turned out to be the amplifier at cost with the company paying the freight charges. By this time, Allan had started using a German Hofner guitar that had been brought back from Germany by a fan and presented to Allan as a gift.

When Allan took delivery of the new amplifier for a cost of £135, he wasn't able to use it immediately because it was still set up for one hundred and ten volts power. So he took it to the "smart bloody guys" and had a transformer installed. He was very happy with the amplifier and the sound it produced. Unfortunately, it only stayed that way for about three months before the German connection caused some consternation as Allan explains.

*... we were playing down at the Majestic Hotel one Friday night, we'd finished at Cloudland and we were doing the pub circuit, we were playing to a lot of migrants at the time and we were playing Wooden Heart which was sung in German. Huck was a pretty smart boy; he could sing it in German. We were trading under the name of Huck Berry and the Hucklebucks at that particular time, so this German bloke came up, he was a full as a bloody state school, he had two jugs of beer and he stuck them fair on top of the Fender amplifier. He was drunk and knocked them over and it went right through. It had a beautiful Jensen*

*speaker, it had only been going for about 3 months, our TV program was just about finished (Allan Reed).*

In discussing some of his photographs, David Cheales explains the limitations associated with the homemade equipment and being in a band, even in the early 1960s.

*This is in 1960. That is my original band with my brother on drums, Ray Thompson playing lead guitar, John Smith on the right playing bass, I'm second from the left. The guitar that I'm playing is one that I made, that's a 6 string guitar and John Smith on the right is playing a home made bass, one that he made. The amplifiers there are all ones that I made. Over on the right hand side, the one sitting on the ground, is the amplifier that the bass was being played through. That was a 10 watt amplifier. The one in front in the middle, that was the 10 watt amplifier that we saw in picture number 1 when we saw it from the back.*

*That's an amplifier that I built in 1960 to play the guitar through. Actually it was a combination of the old Mullard 5/10 amplifier plus some other circuitry that I got to build a tremolo into it. That would be a 10 watt amplifier with the tone control unit at the top that also had a valve in it that made up for the losses, the tone controls bought the volume down so the valve boosted it up a little bit more. That was using the MSP speaker model 20928 12PQ with the tweeter. That was a 21567 with the closed in back so that when they were in enclosures, the wind from the bass cone pumping didn't operate on the tweeter cone.*

*Most of the circuits I got out of Radio Television and Hobbies magazine. This one had a tremolo in it and I remember at that time you couldn't get a circuit for a tremolo. I can't remember where I got that circuit from.*

*No that's right, a friend of mine was a PMG technician and he came up with that circuit and I bought it off him and built it.*

*Over on the left hand side is the little speaker box that we had the microphone going through. That was actually going through, just on top on the left there is a little box that you can only see the end of - that was my tape recorder. We had the microphone going through the tape recorder and coming out of that speaker box. The speaker box that you can only see a little bit of on the bottom left corner is another amplifier that I made, that was about a 10 watt one that Ray Thompson was playing lead guitar through (David Cheales 5.1).*

A year or so later, David built a larger amplifier that was used quite extensively around Brisbane.

*That's a later amplifier I built. That was in 1961. I even put my own [brand] name on it. That Superlined name, I got it made out of a piece of brass and got it chromed and put across the amplifier to make it look something special. That was actually a 20 watt, it was the Mullard 5/20. Mullard were the people that made the valves and they also designed the amplifiers to go around them. That had two of the MSP 12ins speakers plus the one 6ins tweeter. I not only played bass through that but we used it to play records through it. That photo is taken at the AHEPA Hall at West End where the Planets ran their dances on Friday nights and they used to hire this amplifier to play the records through. It was also used at the City Hall on the Tuesday night dances with the Planets to play the records through. So all of 20 watts playing music in the City Hall ... it did the job. People would laugh at it these days but it did the job then (David Cheales 5.2).*

By 1962, David was playing with Jim Diamond and the Lancers and discusses the equipment used by that band and shown in a photo he supplied.

*This was Jim Diamond and the Lancers playing at a birthday party at the Mitchelton RSL Hall in February 1962. The amplifiers along the front, the ones on the outside, the one on the right hand side is the 20 watt amplifier that I made, and I had another speaker box connected to it which is the one over on the left hand side of the photo. It had an extra two 12ins speakers connected to it because I was playing bass through it then. The second amplifier from the right is a 17 watt Moody brand amplifier. They were an Australian made amplifier that the lead guitar was being played through. The lead guitarist is the guy on the left hand side, which is Brian Sibley. He is playing a Maton MS500 guitar through that Moody 17 watt amp and Jim Diamond in the middle is playing a Les Paul model Gibson, 1959 model guitar going through that little amplifier second from the left. I don't know what brand that was but it was probably a little 10 watt amplifier (David Cheales 5.3).*

## PA Systems

Alan Campbell remembers that initially PA systems were very small often with columns of four inch speakers attached.

*... very, very small PAs, little baby speaker in them with very small amplifiers. So the drums were louder than the amplifiers. Today it's the other way around. There was no echo sounds, it was just natural things. ... Nothing was miked and it was raw. PAs were raw, straight raw and these little baby 4ins column speakers, about 12 of them down there (Alan Campbell).*

By the time Alan had joined the Dominoes, the equipment had become a little larger and probably more sophisticated. Some PA amplifiers were used for more than just PA systems.

*For a bass amp, he had this old Philips PA system. In those days, they had those Philips PA systems that were grey little amps ... they were a grey little box with all valves inside. He used that as the main drive amp and he had 2 x 12 ins speakers in a box, one was facing left and one was facing right. The box was about a foot high and a foot deep, a small box (Alan Campbell).*

Lester Vichary remembers a similar story with a different brand name.

*What they used to do, they used to get those old AWA PA amplifiers with the metal cover on it and they'd get a big speaker box to hook to it and that was all they had (Lester Vichary).*

Darryl Wright has a similar story.

*But we started out with very small pieces of equipment. Little tiny valve PA system, I think it was HMV or something like that, had very whistly, crackly microphones and leads that crackled. ... Before VASE amps came on the scene, we were putting up with these little Goldentone amps that were really straining to put out a sound. There wasn't a hell of a lot around and we just had to make do with what was there (Darryl Wright).*

A few years later, things had changed somewhat, although by today's standards, were still somewhat primitive.

*I played at Festival Hall using a 100-watt Vase PA system for the entire room. No fold back, no other power amps to power up some wedges or*

*fold back, we had to totally rely on that one PA system. So there was a real problem with amps but I think we played at different volumes too. We didn't play quite as loud as they do today (Darryl Wright 5.1).*

Even in the country, for Dooley MacDonnell, things moved relatively slowly.

*As you can imagine, singing through a 15 watt amplifier didn't go too well. None of the halls at that stage had their own PA system. You had to take your own stuff. ... But everyone heard everything. Everything is relative. Even if it was a small volume, everyone heard it and had a great time. Now when you go into some places, you need earplugs (Dooley MacDonnell 5.2).*

David Cheales started playing in the very early 60s and things still had not improved greatly for some bands.

*For a PA amplifier, initially we used Jim's guitar amplifier at the same time as he played his guitar through it, which really wasn't satisfactory. I finished building another valve amplifier and it had a couple of little speaker boxes with a couple of 8ins speakers in each. It was just incredible the sort of gear that we got away with. We used that in the band and I didn't get any extra money for that but we didn't worry about those sort of things (David Cheales 5.0).*

## Recording

Specialised recording facilities did not exist in Brisbane in the late 1950s so the radio stations and their “deejays” took on the responsibility of recording, probably because they were the only ones in the community who had at least

some of the facilities needed to complete the task and also because the resultant recordings were often used to promote dances with which the deejays were associated. Few of the recordings that were done prior to 1960 have survived and those that have are not of particularly high quality. The recordings of the Dominoes were done at 4BH so that Bill Gates could use them during his on-air sessions. Gates was running dances (mostly record hops) at the O'Connor Boathouse at the time and identified himself with the Dominoes as well as promoting the Bee Gees.

Alan Campbell remembers that Bill Gates would endorse the band on air with something like “the boys will be playing at Deshon Street and here's one of the songs” followed by a recording they had made. In one session, in October 1959, songs such as *Baby What You Want*, *Billy's Blues*, *Blue Domino*, *Hey Good Lookin'*, *Hopsville* and *Walk Don't Run* were recorded. In the band at that time was Gerry Troughton (lead guitar), Alan Campbell (drums), Bobby Dean (vocal/ piano/rhythm guitar), Derek Harris (bass/rhythm guitar) and Len Austin (sax). Alan remembers the recording process being rather primitive.

The band would set up in the studio with the drums on one side of the room and the guitars on the other side with a total of four microphones used for the session, one overhead of the drum kit, one for each of the guitars and one for the piano. The “one take” backing was recorded initially and the vocalist would record over the backing from a booth with some reverb from a “spring reverb” unit being added as it was recorded. Everything was recorded on to a quarter inch tape from which an acetate record was created on site. Alan

doesn't remember the station sending tapes away to be transferred to record but it usually took some time before the band received a copy of the recording.

The Dominoes were not the only band to record in a Brisbane radio station in the early days but they seem to be the only band for which recordings of their original work exists. As will be explained later, both the Hucklebucks and the Planets recorded the audio for their television shows in 4BC studios.

### **V A S E Amplifiers**

With the number of guitars and amplifiers being homemade in Brisbane, there was obviously an opening for a business specialising in the expertise needed to keep them in working order. This must have become very obvious to Tony Troughton who brought that expertise (and a twenty-five watt amplifier) with him from England when he migrated to Australia in 1950. He began a home-based business building and repairing amplifiers not long after rock 'n' roll began in Brisbane. The business became known as VASE, a name that Dooley MacDonnell said stood for Victory Audio Sound Equipment, a reference to victory in the Second World War. VASE went on to produce amplifiers, especially bass amplifiers, which were highly prized by Australian musicians.



**Illustration 6:** A Vase amplifier.

When Alan Campbell joined the Dominoes on the February 25<sup>th</sup> 1959 he was seventeen years old. Lead guitarist of the Dominoes, Gerry Troughton, played a guitar and used amplifiers that were made by his father Tony. As Alan remembers it,

*Gerry's father, Tony Troughton, was then in the process of introducing the range of Vase amplifiers to Brisbane. He was a very smart cookie. By the way, Gerry's father, Tony, made Gerry's first guitar and his wife still has it today. It was homemade - he was a craftsman. But he also brought out from England an amplifier, a 25 watt amplifier, I don't know what brand but it was an amplifier purchased in England. It had one 12 inch speaker. Now he thought there was a possible business here of creating good amplifiers for the kids. First a good guitar amplifier and then a good bass amplifier in that order. Gerry used to live at home at that time, he wasn't married then, and they used to live at Kedron I think, 12th Avenue, gee that good memory. So Tony used to make these amplifiers, just bare amplifiers with no covering and Gerry would try*

*them out, every second week he would come up with a new amplifier. One with oval speakers, one with three speakers, one with one speaker, he did everything until he finally got the sound he wanted (Alan Campbell **5.0**).*

Ron Cleghorn had a close working relationship with Tony Troughton and VASE. He remembers Tony as a cab driver in his early days but later on as an amazing man with electronics and sound who made a beautiful amplifier. Tony worked with customers to change resistors and condensers to get exactly the sound that was required. Everybody wanted Fender in these early days and Ron took a customer who wanted a Fender to Tony who made adjustments to his VASE amplifier until the customer couldn't tell the difference between the two. The customer ended up buying the Fender because of the name. "The Vase was cheaper and probably better quality but people bought the name" (Ron Cleghorn **5.9**).

Tony was keen to promote his VASE range of equipment and at one point produced three large amplifiers for Normie Rowe and the Playboys to use on their trip to England. They were made especially for the band and at that time Ron's father-in-law made special covers to protect the equipment in transit (Ron Cleghorn **5.10**). Nundah Music Centre had an agency for VASE amplifiers for about eighteen months but as the business of amplifiers became larger Tony moved into larger premises that allowed him to handle much of the distribution himself.

As a businessman, Ron believed that there were two Brisbane based products that should have made it in the world market. He believes that VASE was the equal of anything in the world as far as amplifiers went as was the drum equipment manufactured by Drouyns from Stones Corner. "But people wouldn't buy it because it wasn't American. You had to have a label like the Slingerland or the American name that the American artists were playing. But quality wise, the Drouyn was as good as anything in the world. Their foot pedals were as fast as anything in the world. But it was a brand name thing" (Ron Cleghorn).

In contrast to the relative success of Ron Cleghorn's life and business, Tony Troughton's life was one that seemed to be supervised by tragedy and his business, despite its initial promise, mirrored the lack of success many would associate with Brisbane's early rock 'n' roll music – it was unable to gain the success it deserved 'south of the border'. As was stated above, Tony's equipment was the equal of anything in the world so it is important to this discussion on Brisbane's rock 'n' roll equipment to examine Tony Troughton's story.

### **Tony Troughton**

Tony was born in Lancaster, Lancashire, England in 1914 into a family that was probably relatively wealthy. Tony didn't remember the depression partly because he had never been in a picket line or had to queue for food as many others would have had to at the time and partly because his family was relatively well off (Bev Troughton **5.0**). He was a wood turner by trade and it is very obvious from the guitars he built, that he was greatly skilled in working with

wood. The guitar that his son Gerry played in the original Dominoes in the late 1950s is now owned and played by Gerry's son, Tony's grandson. It is clearly a very well made instrument, the attention to detail being second to none. Tony's own steel guitar is in the hands of Dooley MacDonnell and it is clear from that guitar that he was a fine craftsman. "Look at all that inlay. So you can see he certainly was a good tradesman" (Dooley MacDonnell).

Tony married Mary Laura King and they had three children, Anthony, David and Gerard.

*There was ten months between each of them, very good Catholics. The story goes, as Gerry told me, that from when he was a baby, all he remembers is Ivy, Ivy Dimmock as his Mum. He grew up knowing that his father was divorced and that Ivy and his father weren't married. That was something to do with the Catholic Church. Dad and Ivy married out here in Australia in 1981. I think it was December, just before Mum died. The church said they could get married so they did after all these years. Dad was a wood turner in England and played music. He played the electric guitar and had been doing it since he was a young boy. He said he made his own guitar. He wasn't in any of the armed forces because he was in what they called a protected industry. But he used to be a warden and when they weren't walking around or working, he'd be out playing. He worked for the BBC and they went under the name of Andy Tau and his Hawaiians. It breaks me up, with a Lancaster accent there was Andy Tau and his Hawaiians (Bev Troughton 5.1).*

Tony's oldest son Anthony was born in 1937 and died at the age of 6. During the war, Tony had met Ivy and began living with her, a situation that was not without its difficulties in Lancaster during the war. Tony came from a very

religious family with uncles and aunts being members of religious orders so the Catholic influence was very strong in the family. The Church approved a divorce between Tony and Mary on the condition that neither of them remarried while the other was still alive. Tony never had any contact with his mother or any of his brothers after coming to Australia with Ivy and the two surviving sons in 1950. So secretive was his life that when he died, there was very little that could be said because no one knew much about his background (Bev Troughton **5.2**).

On arrival in Australia, Tony began doing what he knew, playing music. Dooley MacDonnell has some paperwork from one of Tony's sessions at the ABC in Brisbane. It was for a recording session on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1951 and included Andy Tau (Tony Troughton) and his Islanders as well as vocalist, Ray Barrett. Other members of the group were Mervyn Oats, Eric Wynn, Joe Allen and Darcy Kelly (Dooley MacDonnell **5.3**). Dooley also has a ***Unit Presentation Sheet*** of another of Tony's performances, recorded on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1951. The name of the program was *The Isles of Paradise* and featured Andy Tau and his Islanders. *The Isles of Paradise* appears to have been a story woven around songs performed in a Hawaiian style using Hawaiian songs and instruments. The beginning of the presentation sheet reads as follows:

THEME: SIGNATURE TUNE . . UP FOR 15 SECS. FADE FOR . .

*Presenting the “Isles of Paradise” with Andy Tau and his Islanders*

THEME: UP FOR 5 SECS. OUT.

*There is a reef runs out from Kipukai, bare towards low water, with weed strewn boulders and shallow pools where crabs fight their endless battles, and the lilac-coloured anemones open their treacherous blossoms and wait for their unwary prey. Glistening and wet with salt spray, the reef is spangled with jewels of light, but seamed here and there with great rifts of darkness beneath the westering moon. Two figures are wandering over the reef – ah yes, our bo'sun and the hula girl from the village under the hill. It is pleasant on the reef when the tide is at the ebb . . .*

BAND: EBB TIDE (VOCAL)

*Under the hill at the back of the beach, a lagoon connects . . .*

The same musicians are included in the group, who would have been, according to Dooley, the top musos in Brisbane at the time (Dooley MacDonnell **5.4**).

The next tragedy to betake Tony had to do with a taxi.

*Yes when they came out he bought an Ascot Cab so they weren't paupers when they came here. But then, as I said, somewhere along the line he had an accident in the cab and Gerry said he killed somebody and never went behind the wheel of the cab again. He used to hire it out and the same bloke drove for him forever until he died (Bev Troughton).*

According to Bev, Tony had never had any official training in electronics.

*He didn't have any training with electronics, I think it was all just in his head and I think that's why everybody found it so clever. But he put as much time into making the cabinet as what he did making the guts of the machine (Bev Troughton).*

However, it is clear from some of the photos that Bev has that Tony had an interest in electronics prior to coming to Australia and certainly prior to the Second World War. As far as the people in Brisbane who knew him can remember, Tony became involved in making amplifiers in the mid to late 1950s, some time before Bev met Gerry in 1958. Alan Campbell joined the original Dominoes in 1958, and Gerry was using amplifiers that his father was working on and experimenting with at that time. As the business grew, it became a

*... sort of a family business. Dad did the inside bits, all the electronics, David made and covered the boxes and Gerry did the writing on the front, what ever it is called, you know how they put Volume and Control on the front, he did that. So that was a little bit of spare cash for us (Bev Troughton).*

Things seemed to go well for Tony for much of the 1960s. His amplifiers were selling well, especially his bass amps and it was logical that he should try to get into the bigger market. Cultural cringe stood in his way, making any expansion difficult. There was a general and widely held belief that Queensland manufactured equipment could not possibly be as good as that manufactured in the southern states which was in turn less valued than one sourced from overseas. To try to address such discrimination, Tony went out of his way to make sure his equipment was seen in all the right places often setting up his amplifiers for visiting bands and artists, especially at Festival Hall. John Bell's collection has a photo of Normie Rowe and the Playboys preparing for their trip to England. Vase amplifiers take pride of place among their luggage. Tony had

made them especially for the trip as a promotion for his business. But not all Brisbane musicians had completed VASE amplifiers.

*I think most of the bands around Brisbane had his equipment. I couldn't swear to that because I never really looked. The only one who didn't was his son because he never had time to finish his amp so Gerry was always pinching an amp out of his father's shop (Bev Troughton 5.5).*

The next tragedy in his life had to do with his second son David who died in 1972.

*...David would get so much for making a box and then covering it. But I think that him and his father just about used to come to blows because everything had to be perfect and what we'd call perfect, the old man might find a little bubble in it. So David would have to start all over again. He was just that type of person. It wasn't just because of his son, it would be anybody, he'd say it wasn't good enough. ...*

*It was that plus I think they got a bit tired of... neither of the boys could understand why their parents didn't get married and as they got older it seemed to be an issue with them. "Why can't you just get married?" I still can't understand it till this day. They had never really known another woman as a mother and they did call her Mum. When you stop and think about it, David used to get very agro and so did his father, as Dooley can tell you. But we just used to put it down to the fact that David was bad tempered. Then in about 1971, David, at his daughter's christening developed this big headache. He was rushed to hospital and he had a brain tumour.*

*When Gerry was alive we used to think, "I wonder if that was why, when you used to go in and straighten his paintings he would say 'They are*

*straight.'" Or he would drive out of his driveway and he would hit something. He used to fly off the handle and get into such rages. We never knew if it was because this had been there all that time because he would go to the hospital with headaches and they'd update his glasses. So Dad didn't see him again until just before he died, I don't think. So he lost him in 1972.*

*So things weren't real good - that's 2 children he'd lost. Move 13 000 miles away, to come out here and shit still happens, as Gerry used to say. This was around about the time that he had another factory somewhere else but I can't remember where it was but it was over Seven Hills way or one of those places. But it was only doing little bits and pieces. He didn't sell his factory till after the 74 flood (Bev Troughton).*

Nature was the next to deal Tony a blow in the form of the 1974 floods.

*I think what put him out of business was that he got flooded out at least once that I know of but it may have been twice because he was right alongside Breakfast Creek. I remember going in one afternoon to see him about something and he was just standing there. You could see where the flood marks had been up the wall. He had a big pile of speaker boxes about 12 of 15 feet up in the air and he said "Watch this." He got a big stick and pushed them. As they fell down all the water came out of it. Broke his heart, poor old bloke. I think he gave it away from then (Dooley MacDonnell).*

According to Bev, VASE was a good business but Tony was not a good businessman so more major troubles concerning the taxman ensued. He could not be bothered to submit a tax return and never bothered to keep the required documentation to submit one even if he wished to. At one time, when the tax

department spent some time examining his business, inspectors explained to Tony how to keep track of what he was spending by way of paying for everything and keeping records in a chequebook. This did not make a lot of difference for Tony and his tax troubles continued. In spite of this, or maybe because of it, the business must have been relatively kind to Tony because, according to Bev, the Troughton family didn't want for much. They went on regular holidays but never went outside of Australia, possibly because of the tax difficulties. "When he died he never left a lot of money but they had never wanted for anything" (Bev Troughton **5.7**).

There were two more tragedies to come for Tony. The first was the death of his third son Gerry in 1981 and the second was the death of Ivy, the lady with whom he had spent most of his life and who he was able to marry two weeks before her death. Gerry died of a massive heart attack in August 1981 but things continued to go downhill for Tony even further. He was able to marry Ivy in 1981 just before she died of lung cancer. From all reports, the death of Ivy was the last straw. "He just pulled the plug on himself and within a couple of weeks he was gone. They just found him in bed one morning I think." (Dooley MacDonnell). "When Mum died, Dad just said to me "I've had enough" and literally just died. I really think he died of a broken heart" (Bev Troughton).

So what kind of person was Tony? As has been mentioned above, he was a perfectionist who continually strove to better the product he was providing for his customers. He was a very intelligent man and an innovator who had an in-depth understanding of the electronics associated with the amplification of

sound. According to Bev, he spent much of his time working on amplifiers for people who often didn't have the means with which to pay for the repairs. After his death, she found a number of letters in his belongings that indicated he had done work for the writers at minimal cost. Gerry also used to get a little annoyed at the amount of time Tony would spend on repairs that didn't pay particularly well. So most of the money he made must have come from the sale of amplifiers. Bev knew Tony as a very gentle man who had a broad accent that she found difficult to understand at first. He seemed to be the kind of person who could do what ever he set his hand to. Shortly before his death, Tony decided that he would take up painting. Bev suggested that the result of his forays into the art world were most impressive, given the short time he had been working at it. He was a non-drinker and smoker who could be abrupt but who didn't show this side of his personality to the family (Bev Troughton **5.8**).

As has been mentioned, Tony was a perfectionist and things had to be done his way and to his high standards. Even if someone came up with a faster or apparently better way of doing something, Tony insisted his ways were better (Bev Troughton **5.10**). He had very few drawings of the amplifiers he built and was not well known for writing things down. Even though Tony built all of the amplifiers that left the VASE factory, there were few circuit diagrams in evidence when and where he worked. And even if he had diagrams, Bev was sure that he would have changed things as he went along, such was his nature. For the people who worked around him, including Gerry, this was very frustrating (Bev Troughton **5.11**). He didn't employ many people and as far as Bev can

remember, the man who ended up buying the business was one of the few people Tony employed.

Tony Troughton's innovation and success in the Brisbane market parallels that of Leo Fender's in the international market but Tony was probably in the wrong place at the right time. Amplifiers made in Brisbane were no match for those made in California regardless of the technical skill or their maker. Sadly, Tony's lack of business skills<sup>1</sup> and his personal tragedies led to the eventual failure of his business.

### **Prohibition, Brisbane Style**

Not all pieces of custom built equipment owned by musicians were built by Tony Troughton or even directly produced a sound. Allan Reed had what he called his *electrified fiddle with six transistors* especially made for his personal use. It consisted of a violin case into which had been built receptacles for a bottle of alcohol and six small glasses. According to Allan, it had been "our key to many a rock 'n' roll venue where alcohol was definitely not allowed. This was the only way we could sneak our alcohol into the venue."

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Fender seemed to have a similar lack of business skills but brought management expertise into his business.



**Illustration 7:** Allan Reed's electrified fiddle with six transistors.

### Conclusion

Not only did Brisbane rock 'n' rollers have to struggle with authorities to gain cultural identity, many had to learn how to build their instruments before they could start learning to play their music. For some years homemade guitars, bass guitars and amplifiers were a common site in Brisbane rock 'n' roll venues, a situation that lasted until well into the 1960s. For example the first Brisbane based rock 'n' roll TV show which went to air in 1960 featured Huck Berry and the Hucklebucks who at that time had a bass guitarist who played an instrument he made from material scrounged from the Sandgate dump.

The person who had most influence in changing that situation, especially with regards to amplification equipment was Tony Troughton. Even though Tony would have been well aware of Fender guitars and amplifiers, he most

probably would have known little about Leo Fender the man (see for example Minhinnett and Young 1999) and less about the similarities between the ways in which both he and Leo operated. Tony's personal life was one of on-going tragedy and yet, in spite of it all, he was able to develop and build electronic equipment that was regarded by many as the equal of the best in the world. As a designer and technician, he had a profound impact on the musical life of Brisbane rock 'n' rollers.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Things Non-Musical**

#### **Introduction**

Music as a cultural tradition is defined by much more than what is heard in the public or private arena by way of live or recorded performance. Non-musical activities and actions associated with the preparation and presentation of a performance are as important as cultural definers as is the actual musical performance. As a new musical style catering for a recently identifiable social group, Brisbane rock 'n' roll in the 1950s lacked an established tradition which could act as a measure by which behavioural and cultural expectations could be judged. So for many community-based observers, rock 'n' roll was defined primarily by the non-musical activities with which it was alleged to have been associated.

Because the recognised dance venues in the city were well utilised by the conservative, highly organised pattern dancing fraternity, the suburban halls in and around Brisbane came to hold great attraction for the teenagers of the time, an attraction that was made greater, not only by a new, 'teenage' music performed from stages in simple halls, but by the non-musical activities that occurred in, around and often far from, these halls. It was these non-musical activities that created the social and cultural trappings that helped define the

Brisbane rock 'n' roll experience as threatening to some, exciting to others and unique to all. In this chapter, such non-musical things as physical violence, the police, dress, the musicians union, competition between bands and sex and the rock 'n' roller will be examined.

### **Physical Violence**

On the surface, it would appear that physical violence was a relatively common occurrence in the early days of Brisbane rock 'n' roll. The newspapers regularly reported the exploits of bogies, particularly in relation to their brushes with authority, and because of the widely held notion that unseemly behaviour, motorbikes, bogies, milk bars, jukeboxes and rock 'n' roll went unquestionably together, the general public's negative feeling for those who could be identified with the rock 'n' roll movement either by dress or by the company they kept is probably understandable.

While it has never been denied that there were some criminals among those who regularly attended rock 'n' roll dances, their presence accounted for a very small percentage of the many thousands of young people who attended rock 'n' roll dances each week in Brisbane. Most of the dances were very well run most of the time. But physical violence has left an impression and since fights and authority occupy a significant space in the memories of a number of those who shared their stories, fights and the police will be part of this documentation.

Because Cloudland had a long association with traditional pattern dancing it is generally considered to have attracted a different clientele to the suburban halls generally associated with rock 'n' roll in the late 1950s. So physical violence is not normally associated with the venue at this time. But according to John Bell, the venue had its share of trouble. Although John had an interest in rock 'n' roll from an early age, his lifelong direct involvement with the movement started as a result of John Stuart's<sup>1</sup> escapades at Cloudland. Stuart had been causing a major problem by "bashing up" all and sundry, including the police, in his efforts to gain entry to the dances. John Bell was a boxer at the time and was contacted by Cloudland management asking if he could handle Stuart because everyone was terrified of him.

John Bell took on the job as bouncer in the late 1950s and was successful in restricting Stuart's access to the venue. His methods would not bear scrutiny today however.

*I was the bouncer up there to stop Stuart and these other lads getting into the place. That was my job and I was the only bouncer. I used to walk around the Cloudland hall and do outside with the cars - all the louts playing up with the cars, we used to stop that going on if we could. There was a fellow called John Hannay that was employing the band at that time. We did lots of stuff at Cloudland and some terrible things that you would never get away with today. You could get away with it those days because in the old days you could bash people and all that sort of stuff - you wouldn't be allowed to do it now (John Bell 6.1).*

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<sup>1</sup> John Stuart gained notoriety as a Brisbane criminal and was later charged with and found guilty of the burning down of the Whisky au Go Go night club causing significant loss of life.

John was very strict on both behaviour and dress. He felt that it was important for parents to see that everything in the dances was being run in a very controlled manner.

*We were very strict and you know, people couldn't get on the dance floor and yahoo and carry on. They were pulled up straight away and if there was any trouble they were thrown out straight away, barred for life or what ever (John Bell 6.0).*

Des Wallace (see p. 321) remembers an altercation that occurred at Morningside when the Rocketts were playing there. It resulted from the attention a “less than desirable bodgie type” was paying to Chuck Supplice’s rather small, pretty girlfriend. Chuck asked the guy to stop but when his requests were ignored,

*... in the middle of a number, [Chuck] simply took his guitar off, it was an acoustic guitar with a pickup, he simply smashed this guy across the head with the guitar which created, you talk about riots a while ago, that was a riot. People ran everywhere, people were jumping off stage. And Ron Ashton, who to this day has almost a split lip, somebody had smashed his drums and he actually had a bass drum put over his head and one of the knuckles, the skin knuckles from the drum, hit him in the mouth and nearly tore his lip off (Des Wallace 6.2).*

Ron Carroll, as the piano player in the Rocketts, remembers a similar exchange at Balmoral that put a stop to the band’s association with Brisbane’s RSL hall committees very early in rock ‘n’ roll’s history. This particular fight occurred at a dance that was run on a Friday night very early on in the life of the

Rocketts. It happened that there was a very popular and well-established jive dance conducted at a venue in the Valley at which recorded music in the form of records was played. When the Rocketts opened up at Balmoral promoting live music, the crowd left the Valley dance in droves and came over to the live music. Each evening, the police hired by the Rocketts used to patrol both their dance and the local picture theatre. On one specific night, a group of males from the Valley dance turned up at Balmoral to deliberately start a fight, something they were successful in doing while the policemen were away at the picture theatre.

Scuffles were started in each corner of the hall and things quickly got out of control. A fire was lit and a number of books in the RSL library were burned. As a result of the fight, The Rocketts were considered to have been a bad influence on the young people in the area and were subsequently banned from playing in Brisbane RSL halls for some time (Ron Carroll **6.0**). According to Ron, people did not realize who was at fault and what the fight was all about.

*You would never have thought [Chuck] was a fighter, he was very very quiet, very docile, an absolute gentleman, there were never any arguments, he would sort things out in a very easy way. But he loved his guitar. I remember on this particular night at Balmoral, he copped a bit of a hiding there and the next day my dad drove me over to his place, he lived not far from us at Wynnum North, he was still bleeding, his face was puffed up, his nose and everything else, his mouth was cut, I can still see him sitting in the bed strumming his guitar (Ron Carroll **6.1**).*

Allan Reed remembered an early association between the Hucklebucks and Cannon Hill, a suburb a little further east of Brisbane than Balmoral. Chuck Supplice and his band the Rocketts had been playing at a hall in the area but following the introduction of the Hucklebucks to the East Brisbane equation, Chuck decided to move his dance to Bulimba. According to Allan, the Hucklebucks were successful in attracting Chuck's crowd with the result that some of Chuck's alleged associates visited the Cannon Hill dance with less than reputable intentions. The suburbs to the east of Brisbane at this time were home to large cattle sale yards and abattoirs and it was quite possible that some of the visitors were meat workers intent on disrupting the Cannon Hill dance by providing prospective patrons of the Hucklebucks dance with free tickets to the Bulimba dance.

Allan was not happy about this situation and proceeded to physically knock them down, suggesting to them that they "go back and tell Chuck not to be so bloody stupid otherwise I'll come down and he'll get a smack in the ear too". The situation did not end there however. Later in the evening a larger group from Bulimba made the trip to Cannon Hill and the Hucklebucks. According to Allan, "we were all pretty tough boys, we were brought up in the tough and hardship and we didn't take no shit from nobody and he came up and brought a gang up with him from down at Bulimba". A fight ensued in which the members of the Hucklebucks made sure that the visitors would think twice about starting such an altercation in the future. So successful was the physical exchange on the part of the Hucklebucks that the leader of the group, "this

young fellow, he was about 19 or 20 and he was only just trying to be smart, big noting himself" eventually came and worked for Allan as a doorman (Allan Reed **6.2**).

The McKenzie brothers' name comes up quite regularly when violence at the early rock 'n' roll dances was mentioned. For example, one of the brothers, Kelvin, approached Bob Halliwell when he was at a dance in the Newmarket Hall and asked if he was going to sing that night. Bob remembers that he had not been hired to sing that night but like many young men at the time, would gladly do so, given the chance. The reputation of the McKenzie boys preceded them and it was considered wise to accede, where possible, to their wishes. Kelvin advised Bob that he had better get up and sing "because my girlfriend wants to hear you sing". Bob knew that failure to comply would probably have meant some kind of trouble so he was somewhat relieved to find out that the band would allow him to sing with them (Bob Halliwell **6.0**). While looking at a photo taken that night at the Newmarket Hall, Bob could even remember two of the songs he sang.

*... the Mackenzie brothers said that if I didn't sing I wouldn't go home that night the way I arrived so I had to get up and sing. This is the photo taken of that particular time. I was very young ... [I sang] 20<sup>th</sup> Flight Rock, Jailhouse Rock. I can't think of what else but I do remember those 2 (Bob Halliwell).*

Betty McQuade rates the McKenzie brothers as among the five percent of people attending dances who thought that fighting was better than dancing in

contrast to the ninety-five percent who came to dances for a good time. She remembers one by name, Donald, and that there were two older ones and a younger one, all of whom were trouble makers mostly because they couldn't stand to see other people having a good time. They especially didn't like to see male band members attracting the attentions of female patrons, often attempting to start a fight to distract the attentions of those concerned. The Mackenzies would wait outside a dance for the band to come out, often damaging equipment.

*I think Peter Burroughs, he sang under Peter Wild. I remember one night he had a blood nose from one of them. You don't need that (Betty McQuade).*

They were eventually banned from most Brisbane venues.

Rock 'n' roll dances at the Judo Club began in June 1958, were advertised as being for "Queensland Judo Club Members" only and initially featured the Hucklebucks. For Betty, Sunday afternoon at the Judo Club was a great time to try out new songs and practise them in front of an audience. But the Judo Club was not always the most pleasant place to be, located as it was in The Valley, an inner Brisbane suburb that was considered to be "pretty rough". It became known as "The Blood Bath". She remembers Sunday afternoons at the Judo Club, the big bouncers and the fact that there was always someone who wanted to have a fight. This was in contrast to the atmosphere at Cloudland,

*... it was dreadful, there'd always be somebody who wanted to cause a fight and the bouncers got to know who they were. And it was such a shame because you didn't get that at Cloudland (Betty McQuade 6.0).*

The Gala opening of rock 'n' roll at the Railway Institute Hall occurred on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959 and was in aid of the Palm Beach Surf Lifesaving Club. These dances were run by Dulcie Day and were generally considered to be a little rough. Len Austin recalls that there were usually two paddy wagons parked in close proximity to the hall because of the regular fights. He has memories of Brian Gagen at one particular dance picking up a microphone stand and using it to keep fighting members of the audience at bay during a particularly boisterous fight. The fight resulted in one of the two large fans used for air-conditioning in the hall falling on some of the patrons (Len Austin 6.0).

Tom Day felt that generally the young people at the dances with which he and his wife were associated were generally well behaved. It was understood however, that there would be some fights often as a result of young males fortified with alcohol attending the dances.

*Males, naturally there was always fights and my wife was the gamest woman I ever seen in my life. She'd have a brawl of maybe 4 or 5 guys and would set sail in the middle of the hall, she would walk in the middle of them, take 'em by the wrist and say "Stop. It's the women you should be punching up, not your mates." They'd stop. I'd go to go in and she'd say, "Tom you keep out of it." She didn't want me in, she knew that she was a woman and they wouldn't touch her (Tom Day 6.2)*

Bob Halliwell saw Dulcie break up a number of fights.

*At Deshon Street I saw her pull a few people up. Johnny Stuart was always going to the dance over there too. He was a bad lad that one, and she was able to pull him into line. There were some big boys in those days, they were tough. It didn't matter how small she was, she could always get between them and pull them up and stop them because if she didn't, it was the end of the dance. She was really good (Bob Halliwell 6.1).*

Rob Richards remembers “the really bad eggs, the MacKenzie boys, brothers, Johnny Stuart” all used to come to the dances at the Railway Institute on a regular basis. Large numbers of patrons attended this venue, but according to Rob, when “the MacKenzie boys would walk in ... the whole place would shut up”. Dulcie had a way of handling these people, often by ensuring that the fights occurred outside the hall (Rob Richards **6.0**).

Des Wallace will never forget his first night at a rock ‘n’ roll dance at the Railway Institute Hall, mostly because he didn’t get inside.

*I'll never forget my first night there, never as long as I live. I walked into the dance hall, down the alley way, turn left, court yard, turn left, walk up 3 stairs and the ticket box was on the right hand side. There were 3 of our native Australian youth standing there and I had on a pair of very expensive pants, I've got on a Crosley shirt which was worth a weeks pay, a pair of Mellors shoes, they were like a moccasin fronted shoe and thinking I'm just about the best dressed bloke in the entire world. This particular young aboriginal lad obviously took umbrage to my face because he smashed me in the face and knocked me down the stairs for no reason, no provocation what so ever. I tore the knee out of my pants*

*and I got blood all over my shirt and my pants so I didn't get there the first night, I turned around and went home. That was my first night there*  
(Des Wallace **6.0**).

Des has a feasible explanation for the Railway Institute having the reputation for fights that it did. As a teenager, his father and uncles advised him, probably for his own protection, that members of various groups or gangs from the inner-city suburbs generally kept their distance from other suburbs' group – the Gabba guys didn't mix with the guys from Stones Corner who didn't mix with the people from Thompson Estate who didn't mix with the guys from Annerley and so on. The geographical location of the Railway Institute Hall, very close to the central hub of both the Railway and the tram system, made it an ideal place for these groups to congregate and test their combative skills (Des Wallace **6.1**).

Brian Gagen remembers that there were a good number of males, bodgies and their look-a-likes, who attended dances to cause trouble. He remembers one night in particular that these people smashed up Deshon Street hall. Another night is very clear in his memory because it involved his mother and grandmother.

*... another night, my old mother, she come out, her and my grand mother, these 2 ladies come out to watch her special son perform out at Darra RSL and there was a guy who was gonna ride a motor cycle up these 3 flights of steps and ride through the hall and my old mum went and pushed him over on his motor cycle and he took it as meek as an ant. I'd hate to try it now. She just pushed him and his motorcycle off the steps*

*and he over balanced and crashed. And he just stood up and said “Sorry” (Brian Gagen 6.0).*

According to Des Wallace, Darra RSL was a death trap, a very rough place, “rinse the blood off your toga” type of place. It seemed to be the place where bands went to try out and most often the bands themselves rather than a promoter ran the dances.

For John Gray (see p. 312), things sometimes became a little dangerous, especially when a male member of the audience thought John was looking at his girlfriend in a way that was threatening. He remembers playing at a Guardian Angels dance at Wynnum when a guy who was a bit drunk accused John of “checking out his girlfriend”. John replied that “he was just doing his thing”, a comment which didn’t satisfy the patron. A threat to punch John in the head attracted the attention of the other band members and calmed the situation. According to John, as well as the togetherness of the band, mike stands and hands ensured that they “never really had to fight their way out of anything” (John Gray 6.1).

### **The Police**

It has been suggested Brian Gagen that in the 1950s and early 1960s, some police were attracted to rock ‘n’ roll like bees to a honey jar. Des Wallace reckons that even “if you had a rock ‘n’ roll picnic, there would be police arrive”. Most of the people who discussed the exploits of the police in their conversations were very keen to point out that, while there were some bad

apples in the police barrel, not all police behaved in a manner that was considered to be unreasonable. As will be seen below however, many of the names of police mentioned in relation to the control of rock 'n' roll and the alleged attendant "bodgie" element were names that featured more than thirty years later in the Fitzgerald inquiry into corruption in the Queensland police force.

During his conversation, John Bell alluded to corrupt payments but did not wish to expand. According to John, It was regular practice for the dance promoter to hire and pay an off duty policeman to help control the dance. John's memories as a bouncer were that in the early days, the police didn't do much. They stayed around the place and "sat in the back room drinking" doing as little as they possibly could. In venues where John was working, if there was a disturbance of some kind, it was preferable that he handled it himself. Sometime later the practice of hiring an off duty policeman was discouraged because, according to John, "they didn't want the guy who was causing the trouble to be paying the police at the same time".

For the Planets, the "honey jar" to which police were attracted was Birdland. While it was illegal at this time in Brisbane to have alcohol any where near a dance, the Planets always had a plentiful supply (for personal consumption only) to mix with the Coca Cola supplied as part of a sponsorship deal. Brian Gagen remembers that after regular visits from:

*... one of these friendly gentlemen from the constabulary ... you would find that your mixers were gone. Yes and he was involved in the vice*

*squad and was eminently qualified to be involved in that, which is a sad commentary* (Brian Gagen **6.1**).

Even though the policeman had featured in the Fitzgerald inquiry, Brian did not feel comfortable naming him.

Brian remembers another night when a group of police came and “invaded” the band room at Birdland. One sergeant who was “completely intoxicated” before he arrived commandeered a bottle of tequila from Brian saying the he had never tried tequila before. A large mouthful left him stunned and seated until one of his partners helped him on his way. The “bodgie squad” was at its most feared at times when they had what was called a ‘crack down’. “They’d bust a lot of heads and run them into walls and all sorts of things. They were a most ordinary group of individuals” (Brian Gagen **6.3**). But general police did not cause the Planets too much concern - “for every baddie there was always a whole heap of goodies”. Brian particularly remembers Vic Badly from the band’s AHEPA Hall days as a real gentleman (Brian Gagen **6.2**).

Ray Whitrod, police commissioner in Queensland from 1970 to 1976, probably knew little, and cared even less, about the early days of rock ‘n’ roll in the Brisbane. In two chapters of his recently published book, “Before I Sleep: Memoirs of A Modern Police Commissioner” (Whitrod 2001) he discusses his time in Queensland. Chapter eight is entitled “In need of reform: Queensland” and documents his attempts to come to terms with and understand the endemic nature of corruption in Queensland politics and police force while Chapter 9,

entitled “A losing battle” details some of his frustration with not being able to implement changes that he felt might help address some of the corrupt practices, a frustration which led to his resignation in 1976. Corruption in the Queensland Police Force was prevalent well before his coming to Queensland and was later shown to involve many of the police who were named as members of, or associated with, the famed “bodgie squad” of the late 1950s.

Collusion between Queensland police and politicians and its associated corruption had been ‘discovered’ in 1964 by the then Queensland Treasurer, Sir Thomas Hiley (Whitrod 2001). Hiley found that police all over Queensland collected a “levy” from illegal bookmakers in lieu of protection from prosecution. The funds were sent to Brisbane and “donated” to political parties. The well-entrenched, well-organised and widespread nature of the practice would indicate that the exploits of the “bodgie squad” and the CIB in the late fifties and early sixties were but a distraction to its members, police who were to become the leaders of the Queensland Police Force. At various stages in conversations, the names of Frank Bischof, Terry Lewis, Glen Hallahan and Tony Murphy were mentioned in association with the control of bodgies.

Bischof in 1957 was a Chief Detective-Inspector and was clearly not a lover of rock ‘n’ roll and its influence over Brisbane’s youth. He is reported in *The Courier Mail* (20/07/57, p. 3) to have discouraged the promoter of a marathon rock ‘n’ roll contest in Brisbane because of its “demoralising influence”. Headlined “Rock 'n' Roll Test is off”, the article reported:

*Chief Detective-Inspector Bischof acted yesterday to stop a marathon rock 'n' roll contest scheduled for next week. He moved to stop the contest "because of the demoralising influence." The contest was to have been held in the Caledonian Hall, Elizabeth St. on six nights from Monday. Inspector Bischof said that the promoter, Mr E. de Havilland had called to discuss the marathon with him.*

***"Demoralising"***

*Inspector Bischof said, "I gave him my forthright opinion of the demoralising aspects of this type of so-called marathon performance."*

*"I told him what action I would instruct detectives to take if and when such contests commenced here." He said that as a result of the conference, American born Mr de Havilland had said he would call off the contest.*

Francis Erich Bischof was born in 1904 and joined the Queensland Police in 1925. In 1955 he became officer-in-charge of the CIB and with the election of the Country-Liberal Party government was appointed police commissioner in early 1958 ahead of over two hundred other applicants. Even at this time there were allegations of corruption against Bischof but it was not until 1964 that official complaints were made to the Queensland Treasurer, Sir Thomas Hiley, by a group of country SP bookmakers alleging "massive graft, possibly up to \$400 000" being received by Bischof (Dickie 1988, p. 269). Bischof retired from the Queensland Police in 1969 and died in 1975.

While he was Commissioner, a group of corrupt younger police officers were able to flourish into positions of authority. One group of three, called "The Rat Pack" is alleged to have consisted of Terry Lewis, Tony Murphy and Glen Hallahan, all names that were mentioned in relation to the policing of young people in the 1950s. Terence Murray Lewis was born in 1928 and joined the

Queensland police in 1948 from whence he was to become Police Commissioner in 1976. He served with the CIB from 1950 to 1963 and then was given the challenge of establishing the Juvenile Aid Bureau (Dickie 1988, p. 277). During his time with the CIB, he was awarded the George Medal for Bravery when he and Glen Hallahan arrested Gunther Bahneman, a German seaman who lived in the Brisbane seaside suburb of Lota. Bahneman is reported to have been wielding a gun rather menacingly in the direction of his unfaithful wife. A period of time in Boggo Road jail resulted from charges of attempting to kill Hallahan and it was there that Bahneman wrote two books (Dickie 1988, p. 2). One, *Hoodlum*, (Bahneman 1963) is set partially in the suburb of Lota and purports to tell the story of Brisbane's bodge and widgie behaviour in a narrative based on facts that were "authenticated from police and press reports" (p. 7).

Anthony (Tony) Murphy was born in 1927 and joined the Queensland Police in 1944. He was in the CIB during the 1950s. During the Fitzgerald Inquiry, he was alleged to have been heavily involved in corruption. Glen Hallahan was born in 1932 and joined the Police Force in 1952. He was later alleged to have been, among other things, a member of a "triumvirate" which controlled many aspects of crime in Queensland (Dickie 1988, p. 273).

Both Bischof and Lewis were shown to have benefited considerably from the corruption that helped to blur the lines between police and politics, and, along with other police shown by the Fitzgerald Inquiry to be corrupt, had

considerable influence over the lives of Brisbane's teenagers through their association with the "bodgie squad" in their younger days.

Brian Gagen felt that the police didn't understand what rock 'n' roll was. They were:

*... less than cooperative – what they used to call the 'bodgie squad' and all the trouble that was involved in that. There was a couple of rogues involved in that – [Don] Lane ... he's gone now. Hallahan, Murphy ... they were involved in the Bodgie Squad. Didn't they have a good time beating people up ... they were all featured [in the Fitzgerald Inquiry]. All eminently qualified to feature. Intolerance. They didn't tolerate it at all. They just thought that anyone in rock 'n' roll just needed a clip in the ear and they proceeded to give it to them. They called them the Bodgie Squad (Brian Gagen).*

John and Aileen McCourt had less than pleasant experiences with some police at their dances at Mt Gravatt. They were keen to point out that not all police were a problem for them. The ordinary policeman in uniform was most helpful and they used to pay a Sergeant King £2 a night to come and stand at their door, mainly to stop the other police from bothering them. Those other police were:

*... Bischof and all that crowd. They were a scurgy lot. Not the ordinary policeman in uniform, we used to have them on the door. The detectives, the CIB ... bailed us up one night, about 8 detectives and they went straight through. They lines up the boys on one side and the girls on the other and the young detectives going along saying to the girls saying "Hello who are you" and touching them on the breasts. And then you*

*could see the young lads, their boyfriends, you could see them starting to boil because they weren't allowed to do that so why should the police have the privilege of feeling the girls up. You were picked on, there's no doubt about it (Aileen McCourt 6.2).*

According to Des Wallace, it was not good to be considered a bodgie or a widgie in those days. Police tended to target people who were dressed in certain ways with boys who wore pegged pants and bright shirts being considered bodgies and girls who dressed in the multi-petticoat fashion being considered to be widgies. Des remembers the police driving around in some unusual cars, - a Vanguard Spacemaster, a Plymouth "something" and a Ford twin spinner. He remembers names like Herbert, Hallahan, "Glen Hallahan he was a villain", Tony Murphy, Pat Heathcoat, Pat Bailey, "and the other illustrious fellow, Mr Lewis". According to Des, the days of the 'bodgie squad', 1959, 1960 and 1961, were hard days – "you didn't step out of line and back answer any police in those days. You'd only have the one result" (Des Wallace).

The bodgie squad is reported to have, at times, set themselves up as arbiters of suitable dress fashion for young people in Brisbane. This required that a supply of suitable, conventional clothing be kept at their headquarters and distributed where appropriate. At times, a young male who was wearing a black or a dark blue shirt would be taken to the station, advised to remove the shirt, and told to replace it with a Woolworths type white shirt and suitable tie. The dark shirt was returned to the owner wrapped with advice:

*...that's how you come to town, you wear a white shirt and tie, you don't come here wearing a black shirt, you look like a criminal, that's it. Get rid of that haircut, get rid of those clothes, this is how you should be dressed (Des Wallace 6.3).*

Shirley Cronau remembers that the police regularly told the group with which she was associated to move on. Often after dances had finished at eleven o'clock, the "cops all used to come around and tell you to get moving" for no apparent reason. According to Angelo Macaudo, the group just accepted the direction and complied. "No one ever back chatted the coppers in those days." After a dance, the place to move on to if you didn't have a girl to take home was a hamburger joint somewhere that had a jukebox into which "somebody would whack some money ... and we'd buy a hamburger and just yahoo around there till about 1 o'clock in the morning". One particular night at the hamburger joint opposite the Shamrock Hotel, a 'bikie' gang was passing the time in a manner one would expect it to do at a hamburger joint.

*There was one particular guy by the name of Donny Lind who was a fairly solid sort of a bloke with fists you wouldn't believe. The coppers came along and asked us to move along and Donny said "Go and get fucked." The coppers jumped on him straight away. There were 3 coppers and this is the honest truth, Donny put 2 of them in hospital with concussion. That was down in James Street in the Valley, between the Valley and New Farm (Angelo Macaudo 6.1).*

## Dress

Important as dress was to many teenagers, for some families, conservative dress rules continued to apply. For Alan Campbell, being allowed to wear long trousers was an important and memorable point in his life.

*I can remember the clothes worn during my younger years. Shorts until I was 16 (high school age). My family had these strict dress rules that when up to the age of 16, you were not allowed to wear long trousers. My very first long trousers were black (with very tight cuffs) with green flecks. Together with pointed shoes, Elvis hair do. Don't forget this was in the widgie and bodgie days. It felt great to wear long trousers, as it made you feel grown up (Alan Campbell).*

As one of the very few early rock 'n' roll singers, Betty McQuade had to learn her on-stage dress sense from what was worn by other female stage acts of the time.

*Well in the early days, to me, in those days, you either had skintight short skirt with a jumper you had a flared skirt with 17 petticoats. There was no in between. And in those days girls didn't wear pants. The first time I saw the pants on anyone was Alyce Leslie [in 1957] when she came out as the female Elvis Presley. How disgusting for a woman to wear slacks, you know. I thought it was terrible because, I mean, Alyce Leslie wasn't little. She was quite heavy. Well to me she looked heavy. To me she looked cheap in what she was dressed in. To me it was a bad image. It showed every bulge that she had which was the image they were trying to get, to make her look bad, like the Elvis thing when she wore his pants and everything on stage and that. But to me I didn't think it was right for a female to look like that. I thought it was putting female singers down.*

*But I mean she made her money, she did her thing and good luck to her.  
But I used to wear just plain things ... (Betty McQuade).*

Betty's mother had a keen interest in her career and suggested that:

*"You're gonna have to get some nice evening dresses to sing in" so she took me into Rockmans and I got the evening dresses, sparkle ones and everything and I sang rock 'n' roll in those and I am still singing rock 'n' roll in the long gear. But I also wear the long sequined pants and all those sort of things where as I started out in the beginning just dressing like other people. And then slowly as you get going, you realise that you've got to dress like an entertainer. So we used to go everywhere and watch everybody and see what they wore, see what I liked, see what I didn't like. I mean there was no place to go where you could learn this. So that you learned by trial and error, the right colours, how to use the microphone properly, the hair, the makeup when you get lights on it its gotta be about 3 shades darker otherwise you look like a ghost, all these little things there was nowhere you could go and say to somebody "well look is this what you do". You could go into \*\*\* and buy the pancake makeup but there was no theatrical place where you could go to to learn how to be an entertainer (Betty McQuade).*

For many rock 'n' rollers, the way one looked was considered an important part of being a teenager. Often, a large percentage of the weekly wage was spent on achieving the correct image. For Angelo Macaudo, that often amounted to seventy-five percent of his wage. For Shirley Cronau, a new outfit each week to go to Busteed's was important, something that presented a somewhat different set of problems for a teenager in the 1950s to what it does now. Shops generally did not carry a large range of ready-made clothes and

those “off the hook” clothes that were available were more often not the most fashionable. So Shirley learned to make her own dresses, even to drafting her own patterns of fashions she had seen.

*You'd draft your own pattern then and you could make it from there. It's not like today when you could buy all these patterns and things, there wasn't even that around* (Shirley Cronau).

While some fashions would be noticed in books, Shirley got most of her dress-design ideas from the movies. She remembers the first dress she had made for her to go to a ball. She described to her dressmaker a gown that she had seen in a movie called *Come Back Little Sheeba*. Shirley recalls having a regular dressmaker from whom it was always cheaper to get a dress made than to buy one “off the hook” (Shirley Cronau **6.0**).

Shirley wasn't allowed to wear make-up until she was fifteen

*I used to put my lipstick on down the corner so Mum wouldn't know. I must have been really stupid to think my mother wouldn't know. But then I can always remember my Grandmother saying to me "If you have to wear that terrible make-up, at least go somewhere and learn to put it on." So she sent me off to a modelling school because that was the thing that they did for you in those days. So I went to a modelling school called Dorothy Burkes in the Valley and learned how to put make-up on and all this kind of stuff* (Shirley Cronau **6.1**).

In her younger days of going to dances, Busteads was Shirley's place of choice. As she got older though, Cloudland became the place to be so her ‘going out’ night changed from Friday to Saturday night. Saturday afternoon

was dedicated to preparing for the evening. This included doing her nails with paint that had to be removed before she went to Communion on Sunday if anything a little outrageous, such as green or purple or dark blue was applied. Shirley's grandmother could handle the traditional colours but "she used to get pretty upset about" those less traditional. As well as the fingernails, her hair received close attention.

*Well in the 50s you didn't go to the hairdressers. You'd wash it and dry it. There was no such thing as hair dryers ... no dryers and no conditioner or stuff like that. So you just used to dry it and fortunately mine was curly so it just used to go whatever way it was. But then, when the 60s came in, it was really the first time that hairdressers came round for us. They had been there for the little old ladies in the past but never for our age group (Shirley Cronau 6.2).*

Well into the 1960s, hairdressers started being used more regularly by the younger women and Shirley remembers Brian Jackson, a former Sydney hairdresser who built up quite a successful business when he moved to Brisbane. After work each Friday, Shirley used to go to his rather small and crowded saloon to have her hair done (at a time when teasing and rollers came in), pay 4/- for a cab fare home to Kangaroo Point, quickly have a shower and get dressed in readiness for the evening's entertainment.

For Angelo, taking a girl out on Friday night often meant meeting her there.

*Basically you'd meet somebody there but if you were going with a girl at the time, you'd say "I'll meet you there." You didn't go out of your way to*

*pick her up or go and pick her up in a taxi because you just couldn't afford it in those days. You would meet your own crowd and then you'd go and ask a girl for a dance. Then through the course of the evening, if there was somebody you fancied, you'd ask if you could take them home. That was a bit of a problem because you wanted to take them home but a lot of the time you'd try to pick someone who wasn't too far out of town. Shirley used to live at Kangaroo Point so I used to big note myself and take her home in a taxi. Then I'd have to walk from Kangaroo Point to New Farm across the Storey Bridge (Angelo Macaudo 6.2).*

### **Musicians Union**

The musicians union was reputed to hold a sense of sway over the minds of many of the rock 'n' roll musicians in the early days. As a group, it had held some influence over who worked where in the past and was keen to maintain that influence. For example, Tom Day explained that Claude Carnell, who ran the Playroom Cabaret at Currumbin would often phone Dulcie to ask her to arrange for a particular musician for a particular job; "Dulcie I want a trombone player or I want something, I want a drummer for Saturday night." Dulcie had a good working relationship with the union. Bill Robertson, who ran the union at the time, knew both Dulcie and her father well as a result of their time in the Trocadero. In response to Claude's request, she would contact the union to arrange for a suitable musician to take the job down at the Playroom.

According to Darryl Wright, a similar attitude existed in the musicians' union as to that of the union associated with his day job.

*I had only been in the job one week and the union rep came along and said, “Ok we’ll sign you up for the union.” I said, “I don’t want to be in the union.” He said, “Son I gotta tell you, I’m the union rep. and if you don’t join the clerks union you’ll be out of this place that quick.” That’s how unions were in those days. You just had to join the union. A lot of that rubbed off onto the musicians union. They were a fairly militant bunch and whilst they didn’t like rock ‘n’ rollers, the so called purist type musos, the guys who played in the orchestras at Cloudland etc, they would encourage us to join the union (Darryl Wright **6.0**).*

Many of the rock ‘n’ rollers were like Darryl, did not wish to join the union but eventually did so as a result of strong encouragement. Initially, union members, who were mostly established musicians, were not particularly concerned about a challenge from them because rock ‘n’ roll was generally considered to be a passing fad. With the general lessening of the amount of work that was going to the established musicians however, the union soon became much more interested in these potential new members. For Darryl Wright, the people who were most influential in the union and who were least interested in the needs of the young band members were the established musicians, “the people who played jazz, who were qualified musicians, they really looked down their noses at all of us rock ‘n’ rollers”.

In order to work regularly, Alan Campbell had to be a member of the musicians union. “If you weren’t a member of the union you could not play at Cloudland. That was a condition. You must be a member of the union to play at Cloudland Ballroom.” When Ivan Dayman was running the venue, the ‘no ticket

no work' rule was strictly adhered to. Tom Day remembers Bill Robertson visiting a mid-day record hop Dulcie was running at City Hall. She had hired the Planets, which presented a problem for Bill. "Righto Dulcie, get your cheque book out. If you don't I'll shut you down. They're not in the union." Dulcie wrote out a cheque and bought all the band members union tickets. Tom was not aware of any situations where the union had actually shut any venue down - "it was all bluff".

Not all musicians felt coerced into joining the union. Ron Carroll wasn't asked to join the union primarily because, to his knowledge,

*... the union didn't want to know much about us in the rock 'n' roll days  
... I joined the union myself, I thought it was important. I don't think anyone thought that this thing called rock 'n' roll was going to last (Ron Carroll 6.3).*

Allan Reed and his band the Hucklebucks joined the union because they had no alternative. Allan felt that because they were one of the more successful bands in Brisbane at the time, the union wanted its piece of the action. If they didn't join, the union would threaten them with closing down a venue. The union did not impress Allan greatly, their bark being much worse than their bite.

*It was just a bunch of bloody wharf labourers, I reckoned they were. Council workers maybe. I'll tell you what, they didn't have a brain in their bloody head. A bunch of idiots. We didn't take a great deal of notice. If we could get away with it, we would, we'd go along and play (Allan Reed).*

One particular exchange with the union remains strong in Allan's memory. It has to do with the six month contract the Hucklebucks had with Channel 9 to provide the music for Brisbane's first rock 'n' roll TV show, the Coca Cola Hi Fi Club. Allan remembers the head of the union as Robbie Robinson - "we used to call him Robbo the Robber, that was his nick name, everybody had a handle in those days". Prior to accepting the job, Allan contacted Robbo to find out what the union rates were for such a job – "Robbie Robinson was full as a state school one day and he gave me the figure about what money we were to charge Channel 9." He remembers that in those days the rates were quoted in guineas, for example £1/1/0 or £2/2/0, and charged at a certain amount for three hours and time and a half after that. As a result of a complaint about the amount they were being paid, the Hucklebucks:

*... were called, one Saturday morning, into face the 12 just men of the union. So I said to the boys in the band, I'm the lead guitar picker, I'm the manager of this band, so come along but shut up. I don't want you to say a bloody word, just sit there. I'll do the talking ... So I just stood up and said "Mr Robinson, 2 weeks ago you gave me the figures as to how much we were to charge. We got that instruction from you." I got into him and argued so we got let off the hook. But, in the mean time, these guys had approached Channel 9 to take on the contract. It happened to be the Planets. They were the guys that did the complaining. They were the guys that went up to Cloudband and took out a petition and things like that. We were being paid too much so the Planets got under our bloody neck. They got the contract (Allan Reed 6.4).*

## Competition Between Bands

While the business side of the music industry did not concern many of the very early band members, it did not take long for competition for business and success between bands rear its head. There are at least two sides to most of these stories as is the case with the Coca Cola Hi Fi contract. Allan Reed's side of the story was told above. Rob Richards remembers another side. According to Rob, the Hucklebucks and the Planets were both in the running to provide the music for the show that was to be compered by Johnny James on Channel 9. Initially there was just one band selected, the Hucklebucks, much to the consternation of the Planets. Rob Richards thought that the Planets should be doing the job so he decided to do something about the situation.

*In those days your popularity was assessed by an awful magazine called TV Week which used to be a weekly magazine. You used to be able to write letters to the editor in TV Week with a good chance of them being printed because they didn't get a lot of letters. So we clicked to that and I used to write letters to the editor of TV Week like, "That band the Hucklebucks, they're absolute crap. Why don't you stick with the Planets, they're much better. Signed so 'n' so" ... these letters they had a profound effect on the producers of the show. We were called into meeting, you know, and the producer from Channel 9 John Frank, the poor old Hucklebucks didn't know this but we used to get into these meetings and John Frank would say to the Coca Cola guy Arch Ball and everybody else that "We should use the Planets more often. Just have a look at TV Week." TV Week was their own bloody magazine; TV Week was a Channel 9 magazine. He'd say "Oh we've got to use the Planets. Look at all these letters, there's all these letters coming in." I must have written 50 or 60 letters. Try and write with different handwriting, you know, try*

*and write with girl's handwriting and boy's handwriting, you know, everything I could think of. They are actually in the clippings. There are some letters that I actually wrote, that I know I wrote. I caught myself out a couple of times because I was saying to Reedy one night, "You guys are just pathetic" and Reedy said to me something like, "That's exactly what that letter in last week's TV Week said." Oh no. But all in good fun. Nothing untoward. I think in actual fact that Johnny James convinced Arch Ball that they needed two bands rather than one band because he said while all this stirring is going on in TV Week why not let it go. So that was all right, we survived (Rob Richards 6.1).*

The Planets stayed with the program after the Hucklebucks left at the end of their six-month contract. "The HiFi Club turned into Teen Beat. Teen Beat was a much more progressive show and we had that by ourselves for about three and a half years" (Rob Richards).

For a number of years, Cloudland hired two bands to ensure there was non-stop music for the night. Such a situation was bound to lead to some competition and Allan Reed was again involved in some "good clean sabotage". Alan Campbell relates.

*At Cloudland a few times the Hucklebucks used to play and my band the Teenbeats, right, and Allan Reed couldn't play guitar very good, he'd just play E, A, B, that sort of thing, I can just see him playing E, A, B, you know. He got away with the chords because he had the personality and a good singer and he got away with it. He didn't like some of the music we played and he used to come on stage and walk behind the band. Don't forget in those days they were valve amplifiers and open valves and not covered in and he used to step on the valves and say "Oh sorry about that*

*boys". This happened a few times or broken leads, you know, sabotage is the word. Fun sabotage (Alan Campbell).*

The Teenbeats were not about to let the "fun" stop there.

*At Cloudland we had a room at the back there where the entertainers just sit there and have a few each. Allan Reed used to like drinking a lot. He'd have his beer and go on stage. So one night we thought that we'd get back at this bloody Allan Reed. So he drank his beer and went on stage and we were waiting for our set so we decided to wee-wee in the bottle didn't we. And put the cap back on again. Fixed him up. He never did it again. That's the end of Allan Reed sabotaging out gear. It was fun. Clean Fun (Alan Campbell 6.3).*

Lester Vichary and his fellow band members were not above a little sabotage. In discussing the upstairs gallery at Danceland at Coolangatta, he explained that, "that's where we used to get Billy Woodgate's mates to go up there and throw eggs at the Embers." At Nundah Hall when playing with the Corvettes as second band, Lester's band members used to arrive early at the venue and use a pair of pliers to put the piano out of tune to make their group sound better than the Corvettes.

For Bob Halliwell, competition between bands was pretty serious but people generally got on with people from other bands. He felt that the competition was good for the music scene as a whole.

*The rivalry was pretty hot sometimes. Some of these sheets of paper I've got here will give you as bit of an idea. Like we've got Tommy D who always thought he was crash hot, then you had Barry Shultz and the*

*Corvettes and us. So we were always trying to outdo one another and always trying to do things better than each other. I thought it was good for the scene (Bob Halliwell).*

He remembers when the competition got a little out of hand one night at Nundah when his band was playing with the Saxons and the main power switch was switched off in the middle of one of the Saxons' sets.

*I am very innocent, I don't know whether any of our guys did it but I suspect it wasn't, but we were always blamed for that, I thought we were at any rate, I felt guilty that it happened to them in the middle of their set. Other than that I can't recall ever doing anything to upset anybody else. But the rivalry was always there. Always (Bob Halliwell).*

Given the fame and success of the Bee Gees and the fact that they spent some of their youth in Brisbane, it is reasonable to expect that there will be some interesting tales of a 'competitive' nature relating to their time in the Brisbane music scene. Darryl Wright remembers the Saturday afternoon talent quests that were held at Cloudland in 1959 with the Hucklebucks and the original Dominoes providing the music. The brothers Gibb entered the quest one afternoon.

*A friend of mine was standing near the stage at the time when they did their first appearance. Of course the twins, Robin and Maurice were very young at the time, and Barry about 14/15. They went on stage and the local promoter said to them when they came off stage "That was a pretty good act fellas but Barry, next time you come up here, make sure your little brothers wear shoes." They actually went on stage in bare feet (Darryl Wright).*

Alan Campbell remembers the Dominoes backing the first recording done by the Bee Gees in Brisbane at 4BH in a session organised and engineered by Bill Gates. The recording was done as a demo to be sent to Sydney for TV purposes as a promotion for the Bee Gees.

*The little buggers started fighting when we were recording too. We had to stop and start, stop and start. In those days it was a straight take, there was no dubbing, none of this business, just a straight take. So the Dominoes did the first recording for the Bee Gees and on top of that we did our other recordings too that Bill Gates used to play on 4BH in 1959 ... So we did the first recordings for the Bee Gees and I was asked to, believe it or not, to play the drums with the Bee Gees and I said "No I won't". What an idiot. What a bloody idiot. This was back in the drumming days. They wanted me to play drums for them and they wanted me to go down south with them to be in their band. At that stage we thought of our future, music was a sideline, it was not a career (Alan Campbell).*

Allan Reed reports that he was keen to promote the younger talent, something with which not everyone in the band agreed. At thirty-two years of age, he was somewhat older than his other band members who suggested that he was going senile for trying to put kids up on stage with the band. Allan insisted that they need to be trained and there was nowhere else for them to go to get that training.

*So these ugly looking kids from Cribb Island came along with Smiley. Smiley was an actor and he had worked in one of the Smiley series. At any rate the Bee Gees came along one Saturday afternoon and they said, 'Can we get up and sing a song?' I said, 'Sure. Make sure it's a rock 'n'*

*roll thing. ' The band didn't want to back them up but I insisted. So we put them up and do you know what they sang? Does Your Chewing Gum Loose its Flavour on the Bedpost Overnight. Well you can imagine the crowd just stopped and booed them off the stage. I said to Barry, 'Don't bloody well do that' and old Hughie the father said, 'I told 'em to do it. The boys do what I tell 'em.' I said to him, 'Well you bring the boys up here and you go home. Let me run the kids' (Allan Reed).*

At the time the Hucklebucks were working on the Coca Cola Hi Fi Club at Channel 9 and when Allan took the boys up there to perform on TV, he was discouraged by management.

*'Where did you get these ugly looking kids? The tall bloke's a good looking bloke but aren't the others ugly, especially that kid with the ears. He looks like a Volkswagen with its doors open.' They accused me of going senile and I told them they might be in for a shock. They did OK and we got them a start up there just as singers (Allan Reed).*

Allan was not particularly impressed with the guitar playing abilities of the brothers.

*They couldn't play anything. Barry was taught by an old Hawaiian steel guitar player and had his guitar tuned to the A tuning. Just barred on the 5<sup>th</sup> formation and that's the way he played. You have a look at Barry when he's playing his guitar in old photographs; it's all played in the Hawaiian. So this is where he came undone with me. We were working down at the Grand Hotel, Southport, that's in the days when Stan Elson had the business, the American fella, he was a real go getter, he used to put all the top groups on. The Bee Gees were really coming up good. We were backing them up on the pub circuit; they were more into the Hotels*

*than the dance circuit. We were sitting at breakfast next morning all talking, the Sunday morning and I said, ‘Barry if you’re gonna make a quid out of this guitar of yours, you’re gonna have to get out of that stupid bloody A tuning. You’re gonna have to tune up to the piano. You’ll never do any good that way.’ And Hughie says, ‘I’ve been telling you that Barry. Now listen to Allan’ with his pommie accent. We couldn’t convince him that he would never make good that way. And now, here am I living in a caravan at Byron Bay and he’s living in a mansion now. You can just imagine, who was the idiot? (Allan Reed).*

For Steve Neale (see p. 317), backing the Bee Gees was not something he looked forward to. If he heard that the Bee Gees were on a program the Planets were working on, he would say, “Ah no we don’t want to back them. Give them to somebody else.” For Steve there were a couple of reasons. Firstly he felt that they sang out of tune and secondly they had a “very pushy family, father I suppose.” Steve suggested that even though Bill Gates had a big influence on their early success and rightly receives recognition, another Brisbane musician, Nat Kipner, has failed to receive recognition for the work he did with them. Kipner worked at Channel 7 and wrote a number of successful songs for Australian artists including the Bee Gees. “Nat did quite a lot for them, he really pushed them.” In describing the behaviour of the trio, Steve suggested that they were “little shits, fart arses, that’s all.” But they haven’t forgotten their Australian roots though.

*I went back to the Gold Coast to live in the 90s ... [and] Bill was the manager of the ABC station down at the Gold Coast. He still gets calls*

*from Barry and the Gibb brothers at all hours of the bloody night to ask his advice on things (Steve Neale).*

### **Sex and the Rock 'n' Roller**

According to Johnny Gray who got into rock 'n' roll as a result of entering and winning a talent quest, "I always love music but the girls were my first interest." As a motorbike rider, he owned a leather jacket that usually had to be left in the cloakroom when he went into a dance. For this particular talent quest though, he was allowed to take the garment inside and wear it while singing his version of the Del Shannon song, *Runaway*. He won the competition and in spite of never having considered a career in the music industry prior to the win, accepted one of the many offers to sing in a band that came his way as a result of the win. His initial thought was not about the music but about the girls - "this is the way to win the girls." For John, it was the way to win the girls and success in this field came his way in a relatively short time.

*They used to pull your shirt off ... I liked the idea of the girls mobbing you, that was the good thing ... I loved it, loved every bit of it and I think any artists who went through that and said it was a pain is kidding themselves because it was a boost to the ego (John Gray 6.0).*

As a musician then, girls were never very far from John's grasp.

*Oh yes, the groupies. It was incredible and it was good. But you never really fall in love with anybody because you've lost that track of what it's about. Girls were just there. Wherever you went they were there. They were just willing to go to bed with you, they'd do anything for you (John Gray 6.2).*

Even though some girls would follow him around, generally there seemed to be a different group wherever John went. Sometimes they would even go so far as to fight over him. He remembers taking a girl to a band rehearsal in a hall at Banyo only to arrive and see that another girl whom he had previously been taking out already in the hall. Neither girl was happy about the situation and began fighting. “I thought the best thing for me to do was leave so I left the cat fight and the rehearsal.”

For part of the band’s life, Johnny Gray and the G-Men was a Shadows cover band, a situation that suited John well because when the band was playing Shadows’ songs, no vocalist was required. This gave John the opportunity talk to the girls.

*That was my time to get amongst the girls. That was good because when I came back on stage, I had the groupies already with me. They screamed and that made the band look good (John Gray 6.3).*

Tony Worsley suggested that a lot of males got into rock ‘n’ roll because they could see the reaction of the girls to the band members, especially the lead singer. When asked about some of the Brisbane venues he had worked in, Tony replied, “I only remember the girls, I don’t remember the gigs. I was there for business but they were there for pleasure.” Tony sees himself as a basically shy person but when he is on stage, another person takes over. John Gray saw Tony’s success grow out of the adoration of his female fans.

*He got up on stage and of course the girls loved him and they didn't care how he sounded. They screamed cause he was a good-looking guy. That gave him the ego and the boost to send him down the track (John Gray).*

Vance Lendich (see p. 313) suggested that he couldn't tell all the good tales he remembers because most of the guys with whom he associated were single, lived in flats and for them, life was like a non-stop party. Often, after a gig they would go home to a party of some description involving "plenty of booze, cigarettes and girls". Sometimes the girls would stay three or four nights before they went home. Vance described one particular night at around Exhibition time when a girl met him at the City Hall job the band used to do on Tuesday nights. She was a "well dressed street kid" who he thought might have come into Brisbane for the Exhibition. She turned up at Birdland the following Friday night and "we slept together in the band room." Lance noted that she had all her belongings with her and she told him that she had nowhere to stay. Since he had nowhere he could accommodate her, she lived in his car for two weeks. When he became sick of the inconvenience of this arrangement, he took her to a party at some friends' place and introduced her all around (Vance Lendich **6.0**).

John Bell saw the introduction of the pill as a watershed as far as the actions of some dance patrons went. Prior to the pill, he suggests that there were about fifteen women with whom the blokes "all used to go out with" and probably "two or three that were real players and they'd play with anybody". He remembers one of the female singers and three of her friends, all of whom lived

in an inner Brisbane suburb decided to see how much sex they could have between October and Christmas. Men were lined up outside venues to have sex with them. Such displays became less evident after the introduction of the pill. According to John, the freer it became, the easier it became for the males. “The pill was the downfall of Australian women … girls just got easier and easier” (John Bell **6.2**).

For sisters Pam French and Carol Shepherd, the introduction of the pill came when they were married and had their own children so while they saw that it made a great difference in the lives of many people, it came too late to make any difference in their lives. And coming from a Catholic family, it was not something that was discussed at their home. A friend of theirs told them about the pill. The condom, then commonly referred to as the french letter, was the principal mode of contraception employed in their day (Pam French **6.0**).

According to Pam and Carol, sex played a very different role in their lives to what it appears to do today for many young people. It didn’t seem to be an issue on their outings because they went to dances to have a good time. “It was the last thing on your mind in those days.” Kissing was not even an issue on the first date. Pam remembers being horrified at being told by one of her girlfriends that she kissed on the first date to find out whether she liked the guy or not. Carol and Pam’s parents used to wait up for them to come home from a night out and ensure that when their boyfriends brought them home, they did not spend too long outside saying their goodnights. “All of a sudden you’d hear this voice from the veranda, ‘Carol get inside.’ You’d been out there 10 minutes.”

Carol remembers one guy who walked her home decided that he would "try it on" with her up against the fence instead of just saying goodnight in a more acceptable manner. Carol at the time had in her hand a packet of cigarettes that was inserted with some force into his groin, providing her with enough time to break free and run inside. Pam remembers that girls who did get pregnant often got married very quickly. Preparation for marriage in the way of knowledge about matters sexual was often a hit and miss affair as the following example shows.

*At our place in New Farm, the kitchen was opposite the bathroom, there was the hall room and Dad used to start lathering on the Sunday morning and he'd walk across and he'd say, "Now daughter, I think it's about time we talked about things." I knew what he was in for and he'd say, "Put the kettle on." So I'd put the kettle on and as soon as he went back to the bathroom, out I went. He never got to have that conversation with me* (Pam French **6.1**).

Shirley Cronau doesn't think band members would have had much trouble getting girls because they always seemed to "have had groupies around them. They used to follow the guys." The Brisbane band members didn't particularly interest her but Sydney bands did.

*I wasn't a Brisbane band groupie but I really liked the Sydney bands. People today go overseas but in our day, if you lived in Brisbane, it was like the country town across the border. So your biggest dream in the world was to go and live in Sydney. As soon as you became old enough, that was what you did* (Shirley Cronau **6.3**).

As far as sex with the band members was concerned, and sex in general, Shirley suggested that there was little choice; you just didn't do it out of fear of getting pregnant. As well as pregnancy, her other big concern was disappointing her mother, something she just did not want to do – “I know that she would have been really disappointed in me” (Shirley Cronau **6.5**).

For her girlfriends who did get pregnant, marriage was almost the only alternative. Many parents would:

*... rush them off to the church so fast you wouldn't have known what day it was. Some couples are fortunate they are still married but there are a lot of people that had shotgun weddings in our day that aren't still married* (Shirley Cronau **6.4**).

The abortion alternative was far less sophisticated in those days than it is now. Marianne Renate (1998) described her experiences at the hands of a Macquarie Street (Sydney) doctor. Her wedding to fiancé Johnny O’Keefe was but two months away when she discovered she was pregnant. JO’K insisted that the wedding be postponed and that she have an abortion because “his parents wouldn’t like it and his mother would be counting the months from the wedding to the birth” (p. 117). Against her wishes, Marianne was taken by JO’K to the doctor.

*Little did I know what I had let myself in for – I was strapped onto a table and, without any kind of painkiller or anaesthetic, the doctor and his nurse performed the operation. I screamed with pain so they gagged me. To make sure I wouldn't haemorrhage, they stuck a needle into my bottom and, then, in no time at all, they stood me up and hurried me through the back door in case I frightened off any of the patients sitting in the waiting room. I walked down the stairs, ashen-faced, knees*

*trembling, doubled up in agony. Johnny was waiting for me outside the door and I think he was frightened when he saw me. He hailed me a taxi because I couldn't walk too well and he sent me home, asking me to ring work to say that I had taken ill (p. 118).*

The Brisbane doctor that Shirley knew of was a little less barbarous than that. Whether his methods were as successful is not known.

*There used to be a doctor up here in Brisbane and now when you think about it, it was probably a big fallacy. But there was a doctor over here at Dutton Park called Doctor Ross and he was supposed to give you these injections that would bring on your periods. Now whether that worked or not I wouldn't know but I can remember several times going to Doctor Ross with girl friends of mine and sitting in this doctor's surgery and getting these needles. And now, when I think about it, what we used to earn and what they used to pay for these injections, he was probably making a rip snorting profit. These girls were really worried ... The girls reckoned they [worked] but then again, how do you know? You don't really know because they were the sort of things that you couldn't wait to find out whether you were pregnant any way so you just went and had these needles and that was it (Shirley Cronau 6.6).*

Shirley had a personal experience with Doctor Ross courtesy of a guy whom she thought was her best friend. "The guys you think you can trust are usually the ones you can't ... I suppose you could say it was rape because you didn't want it but you got it anyway." For many women such a situation was hopeless because there was nowhere to turn for support following the event. The police were not interested in what she had to say because she knew the guy well. "It was always your fault. They [the police] always took the guys side." Not all males behaved in such a manner though. "If you said no to a lot

of guys, they would take it at that. So I suppose in that respect, it was a lot easier. I would hate to be out in the dating scene today" (Shirley Cronau **6.7**).

## Conclusion

Rock 'n' roll's "teenage" years were a time of learning about what was acceptable behaviour on the part of its participants both inside and outside the suburban dance hall. And the direct participants, the teenagers of the day, were not the only group to have to learn from the experience. Most social groups had to come to terms with the changes and to adjust to the new cultural and social superstructure that was built on American popular culture but with rock 'n' roll as its phalanx.

As the adjustments were made, so rock 'n' roll became more acceptable in Brisbane because the community in general had some guidelines by which to measure the behaviour of its participants. The emergence of the Planets in 1959 and their ultimate success in the Brisbane scene in the early 1960s demonstrates clearly the trend to gradual acceptance of rock 'n' roll in the city. So it is to the Planets that attention will be drawn in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### The Planets: Brisbane's Gentlemen of Rock 'n' Roll

*... at the time, the Planets were obviously a big influence on the kids of Brisbane*

*(Rob Richards)*

#### Introduction

For many people who were teenagers living in Brisbane during the early days of rock 'n' roll, it is impossible to think of those times without some kind of reference to the Planets. Almost all the musicians who provided information for this project have alluded to the widespread influence of that band and the defining role it played in bringing rock 'n' roll to Brisbane. But Brisbane was not the only city in Australia (or the world) to boast a successful band by that name. The Melbourne Planets used Bill Haley and the Comets as their guiding star in the naming stakes.

*Bill Haley and the Comets were getting top airplay at the time so they decided a name like this is what they wanted, if the "Comets" was a popular name then "The Planets" should be too (Jackson 2000, p. 86).*

By March 1958, Melbourne's Planets were playing at town hall and RSL Club dances around their city.

#### Formation of the Planets

In Brisbane, the Planets came into existence in the middle of 1959 when, according to John Bell, "all the big bands of those early days all crashed and turned into the Planets which was the best band by far in town". John was

probably right on one point and wrong on the other – the Planets did become the best, and most successful band in Brisbane but to suggest that all the bands in Brisbane crashed is a slight exaggeration. Rather than a crash, there was very much a changing of the guard as a result of some dissatisfaction among the membership of another successful Brisbane band.

There are a number of memories that help to explain how the Planets came into being. It can be deduced from these that the members of the Planets were not neophytes in the rock 'n' roll music game when the band was formed. Most had previously been members of other successful working Brisbane bands who decided either individually or as part of a small group, for one reason or another, that life would be better in a new band which was more able to manage its own affairs.

Rob Richards was playing with the Hucklebucks and remembers that he made a decision to form another band while playing at Jack Busteed's one Friday night. Allan Reed, the recognised leader of the Hucklebucks, was not particularly happy with Rob's decision to leave and "was gonna take [Rob] apart and all that sort of stuff" when he heard about the proposed break-up. The main problem seemed to be money, or more to the point, a lack thereof.

*The trouble was there was a feeling at that stage that a few people were ripping you off. You never seemed to earn much money, nobody made a lot of money. Other people were earning money that I thought the band members should have rather than the promoters. It's not hard to figure out that with 300 or 400 kids through the door of the hall and they paid about 4/- I think. Sometimes the band would get paid and sometimes they*

*wouldn't. The reasons would be many and varied. They'd say "Something happened and we can't afford it tonight" (Rob Richards 7.0).*

In situations where payment was not forthcoming, the musicians had no option but to walk away without the wages to which they felt they were entitled and very little could be done about the situation. So the decision was made to form a new band that would cease all ties with promoters and run its own affairs. This included hiring the venue, running the dances, hiring staff such as bouncers and door people and running the canteen. "The biggest money raiser at those things was the cold drinks. You'd make more out of selling cold drinks than door takings." (Rob Richards).

Allan Reed remembers that:

*... in the Planets were most of my original members, because I was getting older, and the kids were a lot younger than I was, and of course I wanted an older band, so I said, "Okay, I've taught you boys enough. You can go and fly" (Allan Reed).*

The initial line up for the Planets was Bob Richards on drums, Johnny Reid on bass, Brian Gagen on sax, Johnny Pickering on vocals, all former members of the Hucklebucks, and Robbie Tonge on guitar. Brian Gagen had played in two bands prior to the Planets, the Rhythm Rockers and the Hucklebucks and was saddened by the break up of the Hucklebucks but was very happy to join a group of the former members of that band. At the time Brian was an apprentice jeweller working for Hardy Brothers and remembers Rob

Richards approaching his place of work along Burnett Lane, a small city centre street on to which the jewellery store backed.

*... Rob was all excited about this new space shot, I think it was a monkey went up or something and he came up with the idea of the Planets and so that's where the name came from. And we virtually got the rest of the Hucklebucks together and formed what we called the Planets (Brian Gagen 7.0)*

According to Brian, their first gig was at the Nundah Memorial Hall on a Friday night.

*The first gig, from memory, I stand to be corrected here, but as far as I remember, the first dance we did was at the Nundah Memorial Hall on a Friday night. We booked that ourselves and promoted it somewhat, we were all fairly crude raw at the time but we promoted it. Some people turned up. I don't think we made any money out of it but that doesn't matter, that wasn't the motivation at that point (Brian Gagen 7.1).*

That first night is still a vivid memory for Rob Tonge.

*I can remember that very, very clearly. It was the North's BBC at Nundah and I had my trusty 25 watt amplifier. As I say, there was just the 5 of us, there was myself, Bobby Richards, Brian and Johnny Reid and of course Johnny Pickering. Steve wasn't with us. I can remember we had a fair crowd and it seemed to go over really well. I always remember that night as the first night and fortunately I've got a photograph of it ... it was a night I'll never forget and you know I thought it was great. I've always regarded it as a privilege to have been asked to play with what I felt was a very fine band, to have been one of the original members (Rob Tonge 7.0).*

The first time an advertisement for the Planets appeared in the Brisbane Telegraph was on Friday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1959 for a dance at the Nundah Memorial Hall in aid of the North BBC. The next Friday night they were advertised as playing at the Railway Institute for Dulcie Day while the 'reformed' Hucklebucks continued their Friday nights at Jack Busteads. Darra RSL on Friday July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1959 was next on the agenda for the Planets from where things seemed to really expand for the band with regular work at Deshon St, the Railway Institute, Cloudland and City Hall.

### **The Planets Inc.**

Successful music business organisation was uppermost in the minds of the Planets to the extent that they registered *The Planets* as a company name quite early on in the piece. As a structured business, all money earned by the band had to be accounted for and banked, all payments, including wages, made by cheque and an accountant looked after the business arrangements. The result of all this was that the band became very successful and the group that most other Brisbane bands (and some outside Brisbane) tried to emulate, a situation that continued, according to Vance Lendich, until the Blue Jays came to town in 1964 and put the Planets out of business.

Allan Reed wasted no time in attracting new band members to his stable of musicians and continued working successfully, apparently without missing a week's work. His new band was known collectively as Huck Berry and the Hucklebucks. Allan recognised that things had changed somewhat.

*The Planets took over. They were the leading band. They formed the big band and they were bloody good. They were a good group not because they were my original members but because they had turned out really a top line band. But its like everything else, they got too greedy (Allan Reed 7.0).*

While it was the intention of the Planets that they should not work for other Brisbane promoters, their journey to success, and certainly the Telegraph advertisements, indicate that they did so quite extensively. Regular work at Cloudland, Deshon St and the Railway Institute amongst many other venues, was funded by outside promoters. Rob Richards does admit to the Planets playing for one private Brisbane promoter, a man called Mervyn who worked for the City Council and who promoted dances in the City Hall in aid of the library in that building.

*The Planets became very popular and because of their popularity, they got booked for dances all over, out west, down in Northern New South Wales, we got booked for all the television shows. So in that sense we were working for somebody else but we were always going out for top dollar at that stage. In those days we were making very good money, in fact most of us were professionals. So yes we did work for people but one thing we didn't do was work for anybody else in Brisbane. The only exception to that was Mervyn, the old guy who ran the dances in City Hall (Rob Richards 7.1).*

John Bell worked extensively in the employ of the Planets - "Anywhere the Planets worked that was the main show in town." He was their bouncer whether they were working in the city or on a country tour; John's job was to look after

proceedings. He remembers the Planets becoming so successful that they were involved in a number of television shows including the Hi-fi Club, Saturday Date and Don't Knock the Rock. Things became a little difficult when they were playing on programs being shown on Channel 7 and Channel 9 simultaneously. As a result of their connection with the television shows, the Planets were able to make contact with visiting artists who were then employed by the Planets to perform at their own dances, to the great advantage of the band.

Image was important for the Planets and dress was important in promoting the right kind of image for this right kind of band. Rob Tonge credits both Rob Richards and Steve Neale with ensuring that the band always looked well presented.

*...we spent a lot of money on the band and when you look back you think, 'Christ we spent a lot but didn't make too much'. We had new types of suits, we had Beatle suits, you name it. We were called the 'Gentlemen of rock 'n' roll'. We were dressed to kill I suppose in the various outfits, nothing outlandish but very well presented on stage (Steve Neale 7.1).*

Steve remembers Bob having flair where everything had to look good. In order to keep things in perspective, the band used to have a meeting every so often to get a consensus on what was to be worn. "That was one thing we did well, we looked the part." (Steve Neale). In the very early days, the instrumentalists' uniform consisted of blue coats, dark pants, white shirts and ties. Johnny Pickering, who sang under the name of Johnny Pal, wore a distinctive red coat.

The band also made him a fake guitar modelled on a Fender – “it didn’t make any noise but it was for effect” (Rob Tonge).

### **The Big Time**

Very early in their career, the Planets were booked by Lee Gordon as a support band for the Fabian concert which was scheduled for Festival Hall on Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> of October, 1959 (Brisbane Telegraph, 14/10/59, p. 60). Besides Fabian, other artists advertised as performing on the show included Col Joye and the Joy Boys, Johnny Rebb and the Rebels, Johnny Devlin and the Devils as well as the Planets. This was the first time a Brisbane band had been used in a Lee Gordon show featuring a major overseas act and the Planets were keen to impress. Rob Tonge remembers the night vividly.

*I'll always remember that night. There was screaming young people everywhere and I always laugh and think that there is probably a number of 50 and 60 year old women with moldy old autograph books with my autograph in it. Bobby Richards designed a new uniform for us, which was a white sort of jacket with a big red “P” on the front of it. We've never let him forget it (Rob Tonge 7.1).*

It is probably reasonable to suggest that one of the big differences between the Planets and other Brisbane bands of the time was the professionalism and business-like approach displayed by the members. Both Steve Neale and Rob Richards had good contacts in the music industry business world and were able to use them effectively to the advantage of the band. Rob saw himself as the entrepreneur of the band, an important asset given the way

the music industry was changing. Another important innovation for the Planets was the hiring of a business manager. John Hannay was the person allocated that job, a job he was able to carry out successfully for about four years. The situation changed one Friday night, following a dance at Birdland however. The night's takings 'mysteriously' disappeared from a car that was parked at the back of the hall. It was normal for Hannay to collect all the money after a dance in preparation for banking. Len Austin remembers the money going missing after that night at Birdland.

*John Hannay used to do the banking at the end of the night. It was a considerable sum of money in those days. He came into us and said "Someone has got into the boot of my car and all our money is gone." That was our night's taking and I can't remember the figure but it was quite a lot of pounds in those days. No one actually believed him. We're all pretty sure that he did it himself because different guys like Brian and so on said that it would be impossible to get through to the boot although he had slashed the back seat to get the money out. But that's John Hannay for you (Len Austin 7.0).*

John Bell also remembered the incident.

*It was all pounds shillings and pence in those days and I remember one time at Birdland, someone stole the takings for the night and the takings were £120. It was stolen from a car parked outside the back and the money was stolen and there was £120 for the night (John Bell 7.0).*

## The Big Sound

In its initial format, the Planets didn't last too long with Robbie Tong leaving the band for business reasons and being replaced by Mike Casey. At

about the same time, Gerry Troughton decided he no longer wished to play rock 'n' roll and so he quit the Dominoes. Len Austin thought that provided the opportunity for him to leave the Dominoes and join the Planets, completing the six-member structure that was desired by the members of the band. It was felt that in order to have a unique sound, the band needed two saxophone players in contrast to the many guitar bands that were at that time doing the rounds in Brisbane. Len Austin fitted into his new position very well and completed the solid sound that set the Planets apart from these other groups with a line up that stayed together for much of the life of the band.

*We weren't complete when we just had 1 saxophone player. We wanted to have a unique sound. Most of the other bands in Brisbane were guitar bands so we decided to get 2 saxes. Lenny was excellent because he could actually play baritone as well as alto and tenor. So for that era in Brisbane it was a pretty solid stuff. So that group, they stayed together for most of, I think our lifespan lasted about 5 years. And everything started to evolve (Rob Richards 7.2)*

As one of the two saxophone players in the Planets, Brian Gagen had great respect for his partner Len Austin.

*Len was a very good musician, an excellent musician. I give him full credit. He was a first class musician and a very intelligent saxophone player too. It was much easier for me to be a saxophone player [with him there] (Brian Gagen 7.2).*

It was Brian who provided Len with his first experience at playing tenor. Len remembers both the Dominoes and the Planets playing at the Railway Institute at

a time when he was playing alto in the Dominoes. When he mentioned to Brian that he would like to play tenor, Brian loaned him his instrument during a set at the end of the night when the two bands were playing together. Len enjoyed tenor so much that he went out and purchased one for himself very soon after the episode.

## The Equipment

For the Planets, equipment in the form of guitars and amplifiers was a clearly important though limiting factor. Electric guitars and amplifiers were available but not always procurable for one reason or another. Rob Tonge bought his Levin guitar, made in Sweden, from Kings. At the time, he would have liked a Fender but they were unavailable. His Levin was an acoustic guitar to which he added a pickup. His amplifier for most of his Planets days was a second hand 25-watter that “had valves the size of light globes in it”. The biggest venue in which he used that equipment was Festival Hall for the Fabian concert.

*Actually, my goal at that time, I was training to become a pilot and my goal was to end up in airlines which I eventually did. I was spending every spare bob I had on flying training. So I couldn't really afford the best equipment around. But it did the job (Rob Tonge 7.2).*

The Planets were one of the first bands in the country to obtain a bass guitar from Germany similar to what the Beatles later used and the Planets were not immune from the difficulties associated with its use in the band. By today's standards, the amplifiers that were developed and sold to try and solve the speaker problems for bass guitarists were very large.

*People would laugh at you today, they were huge. Huge boxes with woofers and tweeters and little panels that were supposed to make the things sound fantastic. But it looked fantastic so the image was there*  
(Rob Richards 7.3).

Tony Troughton was a very vital cog in the Planets' wheel of success and the piece of equipment most musicians seem to remember Tony by was something he made for the Planets. As far as PA systems go, Brisbane was considered somewhat backward in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but it did not take long for the Planets to catch up with the rest of the world, courtesy of the work done by Tony Troughton. The piece of equipment that Tony was most remembered for was a PA system he built for the Planets, considered to be "light years ahead of anybody else's" mostly because it solved a problem that was unique to Brisbane – amplification in the City Hall.

Brian Gagen has vivid memories of the development of the system by Tony Troughton and its application to City Halls unique set of circumstances. It would appear that Tony approached the task of building this system very scientifically. City Hall venue was circular in shape and had an especially high ceiling from which loud sound would rebound in the form of an obvious and delayed echo. Tony suggested that the only way to get sound to people in the auditorium was to "punch it into their heads". Because the City Hall stage was about head height for the audience, Brian remembers Tony proposing that they use eight double-speaker boxes containing oval speakers placed around the front of the stage.

Tony proposed that the “flow of sound” from an oval speaker crosses over at a given distance from the speaker. By placing the speakers strategically around the front of the stage and pointing them down to the audience, they “could actually project the sound from the speakers straight into the people. The consumers were getting a full dose immediately.”

*Only a very small system, but very effective though. And one of the Rolling Stones concerts in the City Hall, they actually arranged to use our PA in the City Hall because it was the only one at that time that was actually effective* (Brian Gagen **7.3**).

People in the know used to come and listen to the Planets and be amazed at the sound they heard. The PA was rated at one hundred watts which seems rather small by today’s standards, but considering that Johnny Pickering used to sing through a five watt PA systems a couple of years earlier, this system was enormous. Another innovation was the inclusion of a number of speaker boxes that could be spread around the hall if required. Because the PA was multi-channel, the Planets were able to mix instruments as well as the vocals through the PA, probably the first time a band in Brisbane had done so on a wide scale.

*I know people thought that our sound was pretty good and I think it goes back to the equipment that we had at that stage ... that's why we put a lot of money back into the band, we always wanted to have the best equipment. We didn't want anyone to beat us because we didn't have the right amplifier or we didn't have the right bass so we were pretty funny about that* (Rob Richards **7.4**).

It has been mentioned by others that the eight speaker boxes were spread out around the walls of the auditorium at City Hall. Brian doesn't remember it that way. "There is a curved front on the stage of the City Hall and we used to put them around the perimeter [of the stage] and actually punch it out into the auditorium" (Brian Gagen).

By today's standards, the mixing of instruments through this PA system was relatively primitive. The drums were not mixed at all because they were generally the loudest instrument of the band but the acoustic piano was amplified, as were the saxophones and the vocalists. Such amplification required a suitable pre-amp be built to handle the four microphones. Brian remembers that the saxophonists used one microphone between them either in raised position if they were singing backing vocals or lowered if playing their instrument. Having one microphone dedicated to the saxophones was a luxury that came about as a result of improvements in technology. Prior to the Planets, Brian remembers that there was only one microphone for the whole band and "you'd always grab hold of a microphone even if it was the singer's microphone if you wanted to do a solo, even in the Hucklebucks' days."

The band owned the PA system collectively and it seems that when a member left and another person joined, there was no attempt at an exchange of part ownership of the equipment.

*And in the end, I don't even know what, who ended up benefiting from it all. There must have been someone but I certainly didn't for the sale of any equipment or end up using the equipment (Brian Gagen).*

## Band Personnel

A big reason for the Planets' success was their ability to get on with one another. There were few disagreements between the members and in fact, even away from their band duties, they spent a lot of time together, especially while working at the Gold Coast.

*Oh yea [people mostly got on well]. Well a whole group of young blokes with testosterone running. Everyone had their own opinion and there were some fairly heated discussions from time to time, but most of all we had a goal we wanted to achieve. We weren't distracted from the goal, the goal was the important thing. Through that time there were changes of personnel as people come and went. As some people changed direction they left and other people joined ... (Brian Gagen 7.4).*

Claude Carnell controlled much of the teenage entertainment on the Gold Coast in the early 1960s running the RSL Hall at Tweed Heads and the beachfront entertainment at Greenmount. Claude engaged the Planets for a number of years to work at his Gold Coast venues every Easter, Christmas and long weekends. As a result, the band members "forged a very good relationship" with him. With teenagers everywhere during the holiday times, there were always extra things to be done. So the members of the Planets not only worked for Claude at night in one of his venues, they also worked for him during the daytime.

*I would be playing in the band at night and in the daytime I would be the beach DJ playing songs. That would be part of the scene. So Claude really did the right thing by us for a long time. Part of the deal with Claude was that he promoted the band. He could spend money that we*

*didn't want to spend on promotion, so he gave us a lot of profile (Rob Richards 7.5).*

As a band the Planets membership remained remarkably stable. There was hesitancy to change the line up for obvious reasons but towards the end, music and venues changed to such an extent that friction between members became inevitable. Sound lounges became part of the Brisbane scene and created a whole new ball game for bands. New styles of music became popular and while the Planets had been able to keep up with musical changes in the past, the surf era left them out on a limb and members began to leave.

*So whenever the Pacifics came on board. About that time that's when Johnny Reid left the Planets to go to the Pacifics, I think that's about the time when the Planets had a natural wind down (Rob Richards).*

Vance Lendich replaced Johnny Reid in a line up that lasted for a couple of years until Mike Casey left and went to Mt Isa. At this point, Vance became the guitarist and Keith Johnson joined on bass guitar. It is generally accepted among other Brisbane bands of the time that part of the Planet's success was owed to their ability to read music. This perception probably didn't match up with the reality. Len Austin didn't consider himself or any other members of the band to be good readers of music at the time. Rob Richards agreed with that summation and suggested that because they were all good musicians rather than readers, they would "just lug it. I used to be able to read a bit but not as much that people thought I could" (Rob Richards).

*We played cover versions and we had a television show going for us with Geoff Atkinson compering it. We had to back every local act all singing covers so every week we had to do 5 new songs. And we did it the hard way. Because we couldn't read very well we'd get up to 4BC and they'd play a record for us. I knew a little about music because I had had lessons and I would scribble out the chords and I'd scribble out a little bit of a riff and hand it around to everyone and practice it a little bit and then record it, done. We'd record what was originally a million dollar recording effort in 15 minutes without the great ability to be able to read or any luxury like that. Unreal. Every week, 4BC and then we'd go up [to the TV channel] on Saturday and mime (Vance Lendich 7.0).*

*Well we all read. Everyone in the Planets read music. That was unique, quite unique. But it was essential; to be able to do that work, you had to do it. You had to be able to read a chart because people on a Friday night from Sydney, they'd come with a whole set of charts and they'd give you a set of charts and you would read the charts. You may have to have a quick run through but that's all you got. Quite often they would just give you the charts and then give you the tempo and then away you'd go. And you did your best or worst, what ever came first. But yea we could all read and my background in music, I started playing when I was about 6, but it was classical music and you had to be able to read and that was unusual. A lot of the bands couldn't so they would actually do it by ear, which is a hard way to play guitar. They still got there but it depends on the motivation of the individual. I wouldn't be derogative of anyone who can't read music (Brian Gagen 7.5).*

Sydney acts would regularly work with the Planets at a Friday night gig and often there was an expectation that they know the songs the visitors might do. For instance, visits from the Deltones required a good knowledge of their

recordings because they didn't bring charts with them – "it was sheer plain memory". Artists like Johnny Chester and Lucky Starr used to hand out charts which had chords as well as notes written on them.

*So you would just follow the chords. If there were any breaks, you could hear them coming a mile away. Which is what we did actually, we just read the chords. We'd know the feel of the song, we knew everything about the song but we didn't know the chord progression so that's how we used to do it ... How I survived, I do not know (Vance Lendich 7.1).*

## Birdland

The opening, promotion and success of Birdland were the high points of the Planets career. Its development and running epitomises what the Planets were all about. In order to break from what they saw as the clutches of other promoters in town, they had to manage their own venue, one that was capable of accommodating up to two thousand patrons, a number they felt sure they could attract on a regular basis. Cloudland, Festival Hall and City Hall, the Brisbane venues capable of holding large crowds at that time were well controlled by established promoters, each of whom rightly wanted a slice of the action.

As a building, the place that became known as Birdland had a long association with the entertainment industry. The Americans had used it during the Second World War as an entertainment centre and called it the Cocoanut Grove. Previous to that it was the Centennial Hall (Burke 1983, p. 62). Although in a state of disrepair, it was ideal for the purposes the Planets required since it was capable of holding a large number of patrons and was centrally located on a

tramline, not too far from Central Railway Station, in Adelaide Street very near City Hall (where the Reserve Bank now stands). Its art deco decorations, its two levels - a balcony and a main floor, gave it great potential as a dance venue.

*... I'd reckon it was probably built very early in the century. The architecture of it, the stairs, I mean, marble stairs in a bloody dance hall like that ... It was built with shops down stairs and a beautiful, beautiful dancehall upstairs. It was only a 2-storey building and the same as the Globe Hotel next door. The Globe may have been a 3-storey building ... But really, really a lovely old building. And of course there was probably less than a metre between them. And the other side there was less than a metre between there and the next building. The front of the buildings may have been joined directly but there was a doorway which led through the underside and then you were in this little alleyway which went out into a court yard type thing, right behind the church. The church is still there, the Presbyterian Church is still there in the next street. The back of that church lead straight into the back of Birdland (Des Wallace 7.0).*

It was one and a half flights of stairs from Adelaide Street to the main floor and then upstairs again to the large balcony area. Vehicular access to the back of the hall was from Anne Street via a lane beside St Anne's Presbyterian Church. A milk bar occupied the front down stairs section and importantly (for our story at least), the Globe Hotel was right next door, across a narrow alley.

After procuring the lease on the building, the members and supporters of the group did most of the work themselves to redecorate the venue. Inexpensive paint, 'a terrible pink' according to Rob Richards, was purchased and friends and acquaintances arrived with their ladders and paintbrushes. Over the space of

several weekends, work progressed in transforming the building. Previous users, (probably for a legal firm), had partitioned much of the dance floor area into office space and it took the working party several weeks to remove the partitions, redo the floor, repaint the walls, do up the toilets and reset the stage and curtain areas. Des Wallace remembers Ron Crew doing the electrical work while John Bell and Des helped to pull down the many truckloads of partitions.

*We all went in there one weekend, long ladders, we got this paint, £1 for 20 litres or something or some ridiculous price. It was a dreadful colour, no wonder they sold it to us [cheap]. The whole place ended up pink but everyone liked it when it was finished. We sanded the floor, did the toilets up, for want of a better word. Some of the funniest things happened at Birdland. The stage was fantastic. It was a proscenium, just like a real theatre, you know, curtain. We put excellent sound in there. I think we might have changed the PA for Birdland (Rob Richards 7.6).*

Opening night was greatly anticipated and proved to be a success from one angle but less so from another. A big crowd of patrons arrived and it was this success that caused a problem. The building and its amenities had clearly not been designed for such large numbers of people dancing in such an energetic manner. Or if it had, time had lessened its rigidity, and their combined weight caused the balcony to partially collapse. The owner of the milk bar down stairs was not greatly impressed when the upstairs toilets blocked, causing an overflow into his premises. Birldand had to be closed down for several weeks so renovations could be carried out.

Deciding on a name for the venue proved to be a relatively easy assignment for the group of young males who were putting the venue together. They were keen to emulate the success of Cloudland so the second half of the name was suggested by that venue. For the first half, "... we were all keen on birds and girls so it was called Birdland. You want to go and get a bird, go to Birdland " (Des Wallace). In spite of its less than safe opening, Birdland went on to be a great success and grand money-spinner for the band. A typical night at Birdland would proceed as follows:

*It was run not only as a dance hall but you'd have a floorshow. Early in the night you'd have a guest artist and then later in the night you'd have a good 30 minute floorshow which would be a guest artist probably again and another artist and then another act. We would have Laurel Lea, and who ever was on at the time, you know, Noelene Batley, Patsy Ann Noble, the boy from Tenterfield and his mate, all that crowd. They'd all do gigs at Birdland (Des Wallace 7.1).*

Dances were run at Birdland every Friday night, just one night a week, and regardless what else the Planets may have been doing, whether it be touring or television work, they always kept faith with their Friday night crowd. Sometimes a second band was hired for the night and often an artist who was in town to do one of the TV shows the Planets worked on would also be hired for the floorshow. The Planets tried to extend their success to other nights of the week but it never worked. At one time they put a big band together, "a big jazz sort of rock band" for a Saturday night but that didn't work. The building was

used by other organisations though, including ballroom dancing classes run by Sandy Robinson and Jack Busteed.

*We tried other nights. Saturday night we tried a 60/40, we hired the Cloudland band once and we thought we'd give it a run. We put a lot of money into publicity but people just didn't come. And we really didn't have deep enough pockets to keep committing to a 12 piece line up sit down orchestra and we didn't have deep enough pockets to actually commit the necessary funds that it would have gobbled up to actually promote that band (Brian Gagen 7.6).*

Experiments were made with respect to the onstage line up of musicians in the Planets with people being hired and fired as they were considered to be required. At one stage, an eleven-piece band was used because a number of songs popular at the time had a large orchestra. At other times, a second front line singer in the form of Bobby Voltz was hired to support Johnny Pickering. Sandy Ainsworth and Mandy Sheraton were also hired for a time to do backup vocals as well as all the female songs that were on the charts at the time.

John Hannay made most of the management decisions regarding the running of a dance at Birdland in the early days. For instance, he would hire staff required to run the dance. Friday night staff included two people in the cloakroom, two selling tickets, a person on the door collecting the tickets and a person making sure that patrons who were not welcome at Birldand did not get in. Once the dance started, two bouncers would patrol the dance floor and two people would work in the drink counter. Birdland had two drinks counters, one

upstairs and one downstairs. No alcohol was sold at the venue so the drinks sold included Coca Cola, Fanta, Lemonade and the like. No food was sold.

Des Wallace remembers some of the people who were not welcome at Birdland including Big Benny from Darra, a deaf boy by the name of Johnny who would “steal the gold out of your teeth” and “a couple of kids from Holland Park [who] were monsters”. Interestingly, Des reported that the MacKenzies and John Stuart did not cause problems at Birdland even though they were feared at other venues. He thought that because of their real criminals activities, they were interested in much bigger things than spoiling other peoples’ Friday nights.

As a bouncer at the venue, Des’ job was to make sure that there was no trouble. The band and the staff had seen what had happened at Deshon Street and at Cannon Hill when the patrons got out of control and were keen to make sure that the same thing did not happen at Birdland. Des always felt that if there was a problem, it was better to talk to the protagonists rather than “rushing in and grabbing and throwing”.

*I believe that even monsters have got a fairly nice side if you find the nice side. Lets talk to the kids, talk them out of making goats of themselves. And if it comes to the point where physical work has to be employed well so be it ... (Des Wallace 7.2).*

Des remembers that there were some bouncers employed at Birdland who preferred fighting to talking but he always did his best to ensure that such people weren’t re-employed.

Even though alcohol was not sold at the venue, it was often the cause of the relatively small amount of trouble that occurred at Birdland. And for Des, dress was a good indicator of who was likely to cause trouble.

*... you wouldn't find a bloke wearing a good suit of clothes wanting to put it on with somebody. If he was going to put it on with somebody, he would go home, change into a pair of old pants and come back and tear your ears off (Des Wallace 7.3).*

So for that reason, Birdland had a strict dress code. Patrons dressed in jeans and sandshoes for instance were not allowed in. Males with their shirts undone "to their navel" or their sleeves rolled up were asked to re-adjust their dress to acceptable standards or leave. Those who refused to comply were forcibly evicted.

The Mackenzies seemed to have a reasonably good working relationship with the Planets and while they caused problems at other dance venues, they seemed less inclined to do so for the Planets.

*You'd have all those kids in and the MacKenzie boys would walk in and the whole place would shut up ... We were lucky because they used to follow us around and be our protectors a little bit. I think Brian Gagen was a fiery sort of a bugger and he was a huge young kid and they sort of worried about Brian. Brian used to be our protector. Brian used to go to the Inala Hall with a baseball bat and all these funny things ... Johnny (Bell) was a friend of all these guys. They were all mates in a funny sort of way. I don't remember ever having fights say at Birdland. We used to cram 1500 people in and I can't remember ever having a fight there. That was on an upstairs level and everybody said you'd have fights down the*

*stairs and out on the street. But I don't recall that and I think it was just we had some rapport with these guys and I think they respected us for trying to do the right thing by them (Rob Richards 7.7)*

John Hannay had the responsibility of hiring the staff and was provided with good reason on one particular night as Des and John Bell saved him from a potentially dangerous situation. Hannay was “getting a flogging” and John Bell was unable to control the situation by himself. He invited Des to give him a hand and when it was all over, the bouncers and the protagonists all became quite good friends. It turned out that those causing the trouble were a group of young drovers from the Northern Territory who were living it up in the ‘big smoke’ for their annual leave. They ended up coming back again and behaved as perfect gentlemen.

*The argument started, there was a policeman there in those days called Des Ball and I thank Des Ball very much. This bloke was sitting on Hannay on the ground punching the living daylights out of him and Belly said “Get him he’s ours” so I grabbed hold of this curly head and I hit this fellow as hard as I possible could. He shocked the hell out of me, he didn’t fall unconscious, he stood up and when he got to about my shoulders, I thought I’m in trouble here and I went up with him. I threw myself around his neck, he was about 6 ft 5, a young rangy kid of about 6 ft 5 and we finished up having a good yarn actually (Des Wallace 7.4).*

### **The Globe Hotel**

The close proximity of Birdland to the Globe Hotel provides ongoing points of discussion for those who had anything to do with the running of Birdland,

especially with reference to the supply of alcohol to a venue that by law, was alcohol free. For Steve Neale, one of Birdland's redeeming features was its proximity to the Globe Hotel. Birdland was one of the few places in Brisbane where a cold beer could be had at three o'clock in the morning. The downstairs bar at the Globe used to close at ten o'clock as required by law but the upstairs bar would continue providing service until well into the wee hours. "The bar upstairs used to be the home for the CIB. All the CIB boys used to drink at this bar." (Rob Richards). The management of Birdland took advantage of the short distance between the two buildings and rigged up a delivery system that ran on pulleys and wire, a sort of a flying fox. The system could be hidden by a large painting that was slid aside to allow access across the lane to a window behind the Globe bar. The buildings were close enough to allow for verbal orders to be placed with the barmaid. According to Rob Richards, this all happened in front of the CIB guys "who must have twigged to what was happening."

*... they came into the dance and they came out the side and we thought "Oh shit they have twigged." But we had done the same thing as the hotel, we had put a whole lot old Monets or something like that, big framed things and we had it all around this veranda and behind one of these pictures was this flying fox where the thing used to go across. They didn't twig. When they came up everyone was sitting around having chat chats. Went on for about 2 or 3 years, this grog going backwards and forwards. We used to be up there, and we never got caught (Bob Richards 7.8).*

Vance Lendich has similar memories of being supplied by the Globe.

*Now the band room had a big painting on the wall and you'd rip the painting back and there's an alley that wide. There was the private bar of the Globe Hotel. So the barman would come there and we would hand the jug in and say "Jug please". He would hand the jug back and we'd give him the money and close the painting back up. Marvelous (Vance Lendich 7.2).*

### **Indoor Cricket**

Another of Birdland's "claims to fame" is its association with a very early form of indoor cricket. The Friday night show would finish at the prescribed time of 11.00pm and patrons would be encouraged to leave quickly so that the staff, and hangers on, could begin playing indoor cricket. According to Des Wallace, Geoff Atkinson started the tradition. He loved cricket and decided to bring a bat and ball to Birdland. The outcome was that staff would stay to have a drink after work and then become involved in a game of indoor cricket. It may start off with only three or four players but would probably end up with thirty or forty participants. Very often, other bands would converge on Birdland after their night's work to wind down with a drink (courtesy of the Globe) and a game of indoor cricket

*And you'd leave Birdland and go straight to work on Saturday morning. I'd wash my face, go to the tots, clean myself up and it would be 7:30 or 6:30 and I'd go straight down to the shop (Des Wallace 7.5).*

*... we used to close down and get everyone out and then we'd play indoor cricket in the hall. Then we'd leave from there virtually and we'd have a few hours sleep and go up to Mt Cootha and do Teenbeat (Brian Gagen).*

*The first indoor cricket and we'd often play till daylight in the morning.*

*Right next to Birdland was a hotel called The Globe Hotel. We were always just sneaking drinks then, just starting to drink, and we used to pass kegs from the Globe Hotel through the window into Birdland and we'd be drinking till 5 o'clock in the morning (John Bell).*

## Other Work

The Planets' busy schedule didn't begin and end with Birdland. According to Steve Neale, the band was "just about everywhere. In those days I don't think you would find a band that would work as many gigs or as long or as varied as we would."

Television and the Planets came to Brisbane in the same year, and with the teenage market gaining momentum, rock 'n' roll found its way onto Brisbane television screens. The Planets performed in a number of TV shows, the most popular being Teenbeat on Channel 9. The sound track for the show was recorded at 4BC on every second Wednesday evening, when the music for two thirty-minute shows was recorded. On the following Saturday, two shows were recorded at the television station, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Brian Gagen remembers that they were recorded onto the same tape as was used for the last session, meaning that nothing from those early days was saved.

*In the later part of that, some of it was kept, but when Bond took Channel 9 over the whole lot was dumped. Anything that was before Bond was dumped. It is a great shame (Brian Gagen).*

The format of the show required that the Planets either perform some of the latest hits or back an artist doing their (or someone else's) latest recording. This required meetings with the show's producer and then with Geoff Atkinson who was a successful 4BC DJ at the time and provided input into what songs were selling well. Most of the successful artists in Australia at the time came to Brisbane to be part of Teenbeat and so were hired to perform at Birdland. Brian Gagen remembers people such as Billy Thorpe, Peter James, Sherry Wheeler, Sandy Ainsworth, Mel Ainsworth, the Seekers, Rob E Gee, Ronnie Burns, Johnny Chester, Johnny O'Keefe, Johnny Rebb and Johnny Devlin performing on both Teenbeat and then at Birdland.

Often, the music selection for a particular show would revolve around a given theme, say for instance a beach theme and it was the job of the Planets to record the selected music on Wednesday night and mime to it on Saturday. Teenbeat went on for two or three years and kept the band very busy. According to Rob Richards, given their association with Teenbeat, Birdland and 4BC, many of the visiting artists must have thought that the Planets ran everything in Brisbane's entertainment world.

*After a while with Teen Beat, we were so adept at how the show was put together that we could have done it by ourselves. If the director didn't turn up we could do it ourselves. In those days it was pretty good fun and everybody would take turns on using the cameras and pressing the buttons up stairs. It was great fun. So at the time, the Planets were obviously a big influence on the kids of Brisbane (Rob Richards 7.9).*

Rob Tonge was to find out during his career as an airline pilot just how influential the Planets really were. As an Ansett pilot, he occasionally had communications from passengers via a flight attendant asking: "Were you the Rob Tonge that played with the Planets?"

*It was quite amazing, in those days we could go back and talk to the passengers and it was really quite astounding the number of people I actually ran into, and still do, that remember the band and remember it very well (Rob Tonge).*

The Planets were one of the first promoters in Australia to regularly present a major recording artist at their weekly dance. Often these artists would be brought to Brisbane by other agents and then offered employment by the Planets. It got to the point that many of the Sydney artists knew that if they were brought to Brisbane for Teenbeat, they were sure of a spot with the Planets at Birdland.

*See the thing that kept the Planets really up there and somewhere near the top was the fact that we ran our own dances and specifically Birdland and we employed fantastic support acts to do our floor shows. We actually rehearsed the floorshows and we had Geoff Atkinson. Now that little triangle made us into a pretty strong band. The kids were pretty impressed with us (Bob Richards).*

While the Planets felt among themselves that they were good enough to crack the Australian music market, they never ventured too far from Brisbane. This was partly because most of the band members maintained a day job and partly because, as a band, they felt that they always had to be around for their

Friday night gig at Birdland. So most of their trips were of limited distance and duration. Places visited included Toowoomba, Warwick and towns in northern New South Wales.

So what was life like for the Planets as individuals in these hectic days of the early sixties. When one considers that most of the members of the band had full time day jobs as well as working and practising up to five nights per week, its is reasonable to expect that things were fairly hectic. John Reid was an insurance salesman, Brian Gagen was a jeweller, Steve Neale worked for the PMG, Mike Casey worked for Palings, Len Austin worked in the public service and John Pickering worked as an auctioneer. Rob Richards began work in the Department of Agriculture and Stock when he left school but later left that job and concentrated full time on the music business. As well as his exploits with the Planets, Rob owned a successful coffee shop in Elizabeth St called *The Cave* and a not so successful nightclub venture in Stones Corner.

*I always had a day job. After year 12 I joined the Brisbane City Council Electricity Department as a clerk and so I worked 5 days a week and at some stages working in bands 6 nights a week which was difficult for my marriage because it meant that I wasn't home enough. I got married in September 1962 (Len Austin).*

Len's employers didn't seem to mind that he had a second job as long as his work was completed in a satisfactory manner. And for a number of years he made more money from his music than he did from his day job. The whole thing

was very hectic and continually tiring. However, “I needed the money for my marriage” (Len Austin).

For others, the grooming (or lack there of) that went with the second job did not meet with universal approval. Short back and sides suited the older generation of the day but not the younger. Brian Gagen was working for Nissen’s the Jewellers at one time and was in charge of the repair section and the workshops. He remembers being chastised by “old Fred Nissen” at one point in his career.

*“Mr Gagen your hair is over your collar.” And this is a man that every week used to get his hair trimmed and cut. So yes he had a fairly jaundiced view and invariably because of my extra-curricular activity I would invariably arrive late but at the end of the day I always used to stay late because they would never let me finish exactly on time. There was always something extra to do after payment had stopped (Brian Gagen)*

## Conclusion

As a band, Brisbane has not seen the likes of the Planets since their demise, so widespread was their influence in the city. Not even the band that is reputed to have replaced them in the popularity stakes, the Blue Jays, can lay claim to such widespread respect, in spite of their national chart success. And it is doubtful that the heady days of rock ‘n’ roll as experienced by the Planets will ever be replicated, given the unique set of circumstances that defined Brisbane rock ‘n’ roll. Even Brisbane groups with recent national and international success, such as Soundgarden and Powderfinger, cannot boast the fundamental

influence that the Planets exerted on the music industry around them. For most members of the band, life post Planets was as successful as it was with the Planets, probably because as Steve Neale said:

*...we were they type of band that didn't have too many bloody idiots in the band. We were all pretty level headed and went from strength to strength.*

## Chapter 8

### Where to Now?

As an oral history presented in the form of a thesis, the presentation of this project is controlled by some obvious restrictions, many having to do with selecting material that was not to be included in the presentation. Decisions regarding that selection process were made primarily with the four challenges as set out on page 9 above in mind, so in posing the question “Where to now?”, this chapter brings a part of the project to a finality that will be a podium on which future historical, cultural and social research can be based. But as a measure for the success or otherwise of this project, that is only part of its purpose. As critical social research, that is, research that aims to make a difference in the lives of the people directly involved, this ‘finality podium’ is the beginning to a future that values both memories of the past and the ongoing experiences that keep those memories alive.

To construct a podium from which each of the perspectives noted above can mature, the memories that have been presented in the previous chapters will be examined from the perspective of the four challenges that were presented in the introduction (on page 9).

The first challenge was to begin the documentation of the memories associated with the coming of rock ‘n’ roll to Brisbane. In presenting this project

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in both notated and multimedia format, it is relatively easy to demonstrate that the challenge has been addressed - the process has been started. It remains very definitely however "a work in progress" (Portelli 1981, p. 104).

The second challenge was to provide recognition for the participants' role both as actors in the coming of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane and as historians in sharing their memories of that time. The third challenge was to give recognition to rock 'n' roll as a vital spoke in the wheel of cultural, social, economic and technological change that rolled through Western countries during the mid-twentieth century in a procession that had an ongoing influence on the lives, not only of young people but of the general population. The fourth challenge was to confront the common sense understanding that associates music education and music history with the "autonomous, unique and sacred" (Zolberg 1990).

While it was convenient to respond objectively to the first challenge, to do so to the second, third and fourth challenges would lead to a 'finality podium' that focussed on "the naïve delusion that one ha[d] trapped the bedrock of truth" rather than the need for "the facilitation of as full a subjective view as possible" (Plummer 1983, p. 14). In order to progress to a 'finality podium' from which democratic historical research can proceed, these remaining challenges will be addressed in trio.

### **A Trio of Challenges**

It is clear from the memories presented in the preceding chapters that Brisbane's rock 'n' roll was not conceived in, was not born into and did not grow

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up in a social, cultural, economic or technological vacuum. As a phenomenon associated with the post-war western world, rock 'n' roll was subject to rules, regulations and conventions, most of which were far from being sacred or unique and all of which were well outside the understanding and control of those who were most directly affected by the music. In common with other cities of the world, changes associated with the coming of rock 'n' roll not only reflected life in the city at the time but they also produced history that demands to be documented.

The participants who shared in this project are few among the many thousands of Brisbane people who lived, loved, worked and played in the city during the late 1950s and early 1960s. They are the experts in their memories and memorabilia of rock 'n' roll and in sharing them, become present day historians whose stories have been shaped by, among many other things, their life experiences. As they live, experience and share their memories, they are historians. Because life experiences continue to shape memories of the historical world however, this project was not designed to be a historical entity in itself but to be part of whatever is required of it in the future. And who knows what may be required of it?

As a means of proposing some possible points of departure for the democratic history referred to previously, the six themes used by Szatmary and referred to in the Introduction (on page 10) will form the basis for a brief overview

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of some of the points raised by participants in sharing their memories with this project.

### ***African American Culture***

While African American culture was the foundation from which rock 'n' roll originally developed, (Szatmary 1996, p. xi), its direct influence was very much less obvious in Brisbane than it was in the United States. Few of the participants mentioned visiting American soldiers, sailors and artists who were other than white. There were a couple of exceptions. Betty McQuade listed the artist who most influenced her as Little Richard. The excitement was obvious in Aileen McCourt's voice as she told how two African American soldiers taught her to jive on the veranda of a hall in South Australia during the war.

The seeds from which a later interest in rock 'n' roll was to grow were sown during World War 2 when American soldiers were sent, often against their wishes, to various countries around the world. Their presence had a profound influence on Brisbane, especially on the people with whom they came in direct contact. Post-war interest in jive, boogie woogie and jitterbug grew out of these visits and was nurtured both in the streets and in the dance halls. At dance venues around the city, ballroom dancing held sway initially but interest in the alternatives gained momentum as patrons danced to American dance band arrangements performed in very organised settings by people such as Billo Smith at Cloudland and Jim Burke at the Riverside Ballroom.

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The latest in American music however made its way into the hands of Brisbane devotees in a less organised manner via the technology of the day - sailors sold the latest American popular records to eager Brisbane consumers during regular visits to the city by American naval and merchant ships. As well, the visitors' dancing skills in the latest boogie woogie, jive and jitterbug styles were in great demand, especially at places like Jack Busteed's and the McCourt's dance clubs.

Despite this, when the time came, Brisbane teenagers adopted a "whitened" version of rock 'n' roll as a result of attending concerts and movies featuring mostly white American artists. Given the 'white Australia policy' that influenced much of the official Australian policy at the time, such an outcome would not be unexpected.

### ***Population Growth***

For Brisbane's rock 'n' roll in the mid 1950s, the most obvious change in population from the perspective of this project and its participants came about as a result of Australian Government policy. By the time rock 'n' roll had a good foothold in the city, so had a significant number of European migrants. As was the case in other major Australian cities, representatives of those groups new to the country were not backward in adopting the music traditions that were new, not only to them but to Australia as a whole. The memories of those who were migrants play an important role in defining the early rock 'n' roll fabric of Brisbane.

## **Economic Prosperity**

Memories related in this project suggest that Brisbane by the mid 1950s was yet to feel the full benefits of the economic prosperity that other parts of the world were experiencing. Changes were on the way though as individual Australians became more in debt to banks and hire purchase companies mostly for consumer goods. And while the adults learned to enjoy the spoils of the consumer revolution, so did their teenager offspring. Newfound access to the toys and tools of rock 'n' roll via hire purchase agreements fuelled a spending spree on goods associated with music and entertainment that was to continue into the 1960s. Well before the end of the 1950s for instance, a teenaged Alan Campbell had bought (using hire purchase) and paid for (from his music wages) a quality drum kit worth well over £200. This was not an insignificant amount of money considering that John McCourt reported that he was earning about £15 a week working for the Housing Commission at the time.

It was access to consumer credit that partially fuelled the post-war economic prosperity, credit that was probably easier to obtain than it was to get rid of. According to some of the participants however, the apparent prosperity came at a cost. Life was not always easy for the breadwinner of the family as was the case for Doug Kerwin. As a teenager, he found it difficult to understand that his father had to work many hours of overtime each week to make ends meet for a family of six children. The fact that overtime was available and that his father was prepared to do it though are indicators of the prosperity of the time.

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Rock 'n' roll could only grow in Brisbane because there were people who had the financial resources and the willingness to buy the products and services that were basic to its survival. While teenagers consumed many of those products and services, their parents should not be left out of the equation. Most of the early rock 'n' roll records were bought by teenagers who would not have had the resources to purchase the required player which in most houses held pride of place in the family lounge room. So it is reasonable to suggest that parents probably had a much greater financial investment in the success of Brisbane's rock 'n' roll than did the teenagers.

### ***Technology***

It was made very evident by this project's participants that rock 'n' roll in Brisbane was just as much a child of the early technological revolution as it was anywhere else in the world. Isolation however, especially in the form of distance from southern capitals as well as the centres of innovation in the northern hemisphere, created special problems that led to some unique Brisbane solutions. In the five or so years that this project covers, music equipment used by bands went from home-made five watt amplifiers and PA systems to Brisbane-built amplifiers and PA systems that were used by the biggest and most successful bands in the world. It is these local solutions, some more successful than others, that tell much about the character and the times of those who developed and used them. For example, it is reasonable to suggest that nowhere else in the world did an emu eggshell feature in the sound equipment of a rock 'n' roll band. And while the emu egg did not go on to become a permanent

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fixture in the speaker system of bass amplifiers, its trial and limited success no doubt spurred its developer and others to greater heights and depths in their efforts to find original solutions to their problems.

In order for rock 'n' roll to get a start in the city, many of the early musicians, guitarists in particular, had to be technicians or if not, had to have access to a person with technical skill who was prepared to work for little or no remuneration. As many band members found out the uncomfortable way, sound was the most important outcome of their labour with electrical safety often taking second place. This was not the case for Tony Troughton however. He had the best of both worlds as far as music technology of the day was concerned. As a working musician, Tony had a consuming interest in the electronics side of the music business dating back to his pre-war days as a hawaiian guitarist in England. As the Brisbane rock 'n' roll business grew, so he was able to indulge his passion for electronics and specialise in the manufacture and repair of amplifiers. Musically and electronically, the VASE amplifiers became widely used through out Australia and an integral part of the early success of Brisbane rock 'n' roll. Unfortunately, Tony was unable to transfer that success to the business side of his venture and this, together with his devastating personal circumstances, combined to oversee the eventual demise of both Tony and the VASE business.

VASE was not the only Brisbane manufacturer of world-class music equipment to fail to reach the success that many thought it deserved. Drouyns

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Drums suffered a similar fate. It would be interesting to find out the role played by cultural cringe in the demise of each of these businesses.

### ***The rock 'n' roll business***

Prior to the coming of rock 'n' roll, the music and entertainment business in Brisbane was a rather sedate and relatively well-organised affair catering for young adults and adults. Its stability came courtesy of the length of time many of its promoters had been involved in their particular facet of the industry. Venues large and small promoted regular functions, each one seemingly unaware of or happy with its place in the local hierarchy. At the same time, Brisbane radio, yet to feel the economic challenge of television, adopted the role of authoritative elder and storyteller. In more ways than one, Brisbane was a centre of conservatism with a music and entertainment industry run by a small group of promoters, suspicious of outsiders and very much defined by its years of relative isolation and unchallenged success.

With all this conservatism and stability as a background, the coming of rock 'n' roll can be viewed from a business perspective more as a 'changing of the guard' than as a revolution. Money, the vital ingredient of any business, became just as much a part of the rock 'n' roll scene as it had been of the traditional dance scene. The 'old guard' was not prepared to relinquish its position of dominance in the recognised venues without a fight so rock 'n' rollers had to make a decision to develop new 'points of sale' in suburban halls to counteract their exclusion from the recognised venues. At the same time that rock 'n' roll went out to the suburbs, Brisbane radio came into the fold by

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recognising the good business sense of addressing the new teenage music market. Assisted by the coming of television to the city and the potential loss of much of their audience, a number of Brisbane radio stations changed their programming to Top 40 format in moves not always supported by the established DJs.

Music store owners also felt the pain of the industry changes and those unprepared to recognize the rise of the guitar and the demise of the piano as the instrument most favoured for music making were in for a difficult time. In the rock 'n' roll dance field, the 'new guard' initially consisted of inexperienced bands running their own dances to varying levels of financial success in previously under-used suburban halls. With growth and specialisation in the industry however, individuals began assuming a greater role in the promotion of dances until by the early 1960s, stability returned in the form of a small number of promoters who had gained control over the rock 'n' roll industry. They even acquired control over the 'old guard' venues resulting in the demise of most of Brisbane's traditional 'palais' dances.

The Planets were an exception to much of the above, running their combined affairs through a business entity called The Planets Incorporated. The band was originally formed for business reasons (members felt they were often not being paid all that was due to them by some of the 'new guard' promoters) and while they continued to regularly work for some of these promoters in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast, much of the band's business success can be

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attributed to the success of their own central Brisbane venue, Birdland, and their hiring of a business manager to look after their affairs.

The Brisbane music and entertainment business changed in a number important ways as a result of the introduction of rock 'n' roll. A new style of music played by young people with new instruments entertained other young people who had money to enjoy the spoils of the new society in which rock 'n' roll was conceived, born and nurtured. One thing that did not change was the conservative nature of those who participated successfully in the city's music and entertainment business. Most of the musician participants in this project saw their day job as their first priority, and even though most of them worked full time at those jobs as well as their night jobs, few who were given the opportunity to work at music full time or to try the "big time" in Sydney took that ultimate step. As an industry, Brisbane rock 'n' roll, with the exception of a short period of change, mirrored the conservative society in which it grew.

The success of the teenage music business in Brisbane in the 1950s and 1960s is reflected in the recognition of rock 'n' roll as a legitimate form of entertainment for young people. Or in other words, it could be argued that as soon as it started making money, it seems that rock 'n' roll became all right.

### ***Rebellion***

A common sense perception of rebellion includes the notion of resistance against some form of authority be it governmental, parental or cultural. The 1950s in Brisbane was a time of significant political, social, cultural and economic

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change and reading Brisbane newspaper reports from that era, one could be excused for coming to the conclusion that many in authority considered the apparently unruly behaviour associated with rock 'n' roll to be rebellious in nature and a catalyst for changes that were not particularly welcome.

Brisbane was not the only city in Australia or the world to host such attitudes and behaviour and to put each in perspective, it is necessary to understand that the people against whom this behaviour was directed, often authority figures such as parents and police, had been born during the depression and raised during the emergencies of World War 2. So to them, challenges to authority such as males wearing Cornel Wilde haircuts, dancing in the aisles at the pictures, gathering at the T&G corner, wearing "fashionable" clothing, driving fast cars and motor bikes and playing the guitar in a rock 'n' roll band were all acts of rebellion that the public should learn to fear.

As the fear became more general, it is reasonable to suspect that the public of the day would have placed rock 'n' roll rebellion relatively close to the hard-core end of a soft-core hard-core continuum. Hindsight however assists in placing rock 'n' roll and its associated rebellion not as a cause of the period's social and cultural change but as an important and vital part of it, allowing for a move closer to the soft-core end.

## **Outro**

In the Introduction, it was suggested that this project was about two things:

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- ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to learn a little about a period of significant change in the lives of Brisbane inhabitants from as wide a range of sources as possible.
- providing music educators and students with a point of departure to their involvement in a music history and music education process that is representative of the democratic society in which Brisbane's rock 'n' roll developed

In addressing the first point above, the presentation of this project via both analogue and digital media is based on a premise that recognises and values not only written documentation but also the public and private memories of those with first hand experience in Brisbane rock 'n' roll in the early days. Such a premise is made possible by the advent of digital technology as a means of conveniently storing memories in the form of (among other things) a digital narrative. In so doing, it is redefining the nature of history. An outcome of this redefinition is an oral/aural communication interface to democratic history, an interface that provides pathways to both the historical and the human side of a story.

Even though a start has been made on documenting the coming of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane, the story from a democratic perspective is much more than what has been made available above or on the accompanying CDs. It is also much more than what is available in the authoritative writings of the day. From the 'finality podium' of this project and in answer to the question "Where to now?", the democratic history of Brisbane's rock 'n' roll will not be complete until "it has exhausted oral as well as written sources ..." (Portelli 1981, p. 104).

With reference to the second point, it is proposed the process of exhausting the oral and written sources will be greatly aided by the involvement of educators and their students in the music history process. In helping people explore “what it means to remember, and what to do with memories to make them active and alive, as opposed to mere objects of collection” (Frisch 1990, p. 27), students and educators themselves will become involved in the history process and thereby play an important role in the adjustments needed to realign the social purpose of the music history. In preparing for his class in a London school to be involved in an oral history project, Ross (1998, p. 433) planned that the program would develop:

- “Children’s oral skills, of listening, questioning, talking, discussing and arguing ...;
- Social skills of interaction, discussion and co-operation;
- The development of intellectual concepts of social change, tradition, conflict and cause;
- Skills of empathy with individuals of a different generation;
- Intellectual skills of sifting and selecting evidence, and making informed decisions about editing their sources;
- Understanding of the problems and values of historical evidence, in particular, problems of bias and contradictory evidence;
- Ability to make records and narrative accounts of what has been found.”

As the program progressed, it was observed that children saw teachers:

*... in a somewhat different role. We were no longer in control of the information giving process, and the fact that we too were asking questions demonstrated that we were learning as much as the children* (Ross 1998, p. 433).

In promoting a music history whose social purpose is to represent the democratic traditions of our time, this project has created a base of data from which music educators can adopt a different role, one which involves asking questions of all music history. As well, students and teachers can play an important role in ensuring that the people who lived, worked and played in Brisbane in the late 1950s and early 1960s do not die without having the opportunity to recognise that their memories are vital cogs in the set of historical wheels that will enmesh in the future to define Brisbane at that time.

## **Appendix 1**

### **The Participants.**

Aulton, Pat	Year of Birth:	Category: Musician
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Pat came to Brisbane in the employ of Ivan Dayman in the early 1960s.

While in Brisbane he was closely involved with performing at and the running of Cloudland and later went on to record producing for Festival.

Austin, Len	Year of Birth: 1941	Category: Musician
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Len was born in Colombo, Sri Lanka and came to Brisbane when he was of primary school age. He started playing fife at school and then switched to violin when he was about 10 years old. Saxophone was his next instrument but was advised by school a guidance officer that he was too intelligent to consider a career in music so he stopped playing it until his time at Brisbane State High School when in year 10 he started playing in the school orchestra. As a saxophone player, his first band was the Red Caps in 1958. He then joined the Blue Jeans while they were playing at Cloudland. Len sometimes played in more than one band and spent time with both Huck Berry and the Hucklebucks and the original Dominoes. He considered his time with the Dominoes valuable because he was able to learn a lot about music from Gerry Troughton. With the demise of the Dominoes, Len was invited to join the recently established Planets and spent the rest of his rock 'n' roll playing career with them.

Bell, John	Year of Birth:	Category: Management
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John Bell became directly involved in rock 'n' roll as a result of John Stuart's bad behaviour at Cloudland. John had done some boxing training and agreed with Cloudland management that he could handle Stuart and so was employed as the bouncer at Cloudland. With the formation of the Planets, John became very closely associated with that band and all their shows. He helped the Planets set up Birdland and worked there for much of the time it was open. John later became involved with the management of TCs, a new and successful sound lounge in Elizabeth St. He spent a couple of years in Sydney managing rock venues there before returning to Brisbane and maintaining an interest in club management until well into the 1980s.

Campbell, Alan	Year of Birth: 1942	Category: Musician
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Alan was born in England and migrated with his family to Australia in 1949, arriving in Brisbane in 1950. He played fife in the Dutton Park State School band but grew interested in the drums. He bought his first set of drums in 1958 and joined the Red Caps. He then played drums in the Blue Jeans for a short time until a position became available in the Dominoes. The Dominoes were musically the best band in Brisbane at the time and Alan saw that as a big break. So he joined them in February, 1959. When the Dominoes folded, he joined the Teenbeats as a guitar player, a position he held until 1962. Following the Teenbeats, Alan formed a band called the Echoes in which he played a Fender Jazzmaster guitar in a 'Shadows' type band. The Teenbeats lasted until

1965 when Alan formed the Clefs as a bass player. The Clefs lasted until 1980.

Carroll, Ron	Year of Birth: 1938	Category: Musician
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Ron became the piano player with the very first rock 'n' roll band in Brisbane – the Rocketts in 1956. Based in Wynnum, a suburb to the east of Brisbane, Ron continued his association with Chuck Supplice when the band changed names to the Blue Jeans until they folded in 1958.

Cheales, David	Year of Birth: 1944	Category: Musician
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David went to Ironside State School and the Indooroopilly State High School for two years. He developed an interest in electronics when he was thirteen or fourteen years old and built himself a valve amplifier. A couple of years later he started playing guitar and began using the amplifier he built. He built other amplifiers and then tried guitars, building both an a six string guitar and a bass guitar. Bass guitar interested David and because there weren't too many around he decided to concentrate on that. His first band of consequence was Jim Diamond and the Lancers and they mostly for YCW dances. Jim Diamond and the Lancers lasted in one form or another until the early 1980s. Some of the amplifiers David made served the band well for much of that time.

Cleghorn, Ron	Year of Birth: 1937	Category: Business man
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Ron Cleghorn owned Nundah Music Centre from the mid 1950s. As owner of the store he was able to observe the changes that accompanied the introduction of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane from the commercial aspect.

His business changed from a piano/pianola/sheet music sales point to the place in Brisbane to purchase anything to do with the rock 'n' roll industry, especially Fender guitars and amplifiers.

Cronau, Shirley	Year of Birth: 1939	Category: Dancer
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Shirley was a teenager in the early days of rock 'n' roll and had a keen interest in dancing. Shirley attended Jack Busteed's Friday night dances in the Valley as well as many other dances.

Day, Tom	Year of Birth: 1915	Category: Promoter
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Tom was a Brisbane fireman for almost forty years with ballroom dancing as his major interest as a teenager. He met Dulcie, also a dancer, through their mutual interest and he married her in the mid 1940s. Tom became involved in the promotion of rock 'n' roll dances with Dulcie in late 1957. The Day family was very influential in Brisbane's early rock 'n' roll, the parents as promoters and the children as musicians. During their involvement with dances and music, the family tragically lost two sons, Tommy to a fishing accident at Point Lookout and Darcy in the Whisky au go go fire. Dulcie died in the early 1990s.

Downs, Sid	Year of Birth: 1925	Category: Music Teacher
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Sid Downs was born in England and came to Brisbane in 1960. He began teaching at the Queensland College of Music and was soon made Principal of the newly established Brisbane College of Music. The College employed up to forty music teachers covering piano, voice, guitar, piano accordion and all the woodwind and brass instruments.

Dunglison, Ted	Year of Birth: 1934	Category: Priest
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Ted ran Club 64 that was based at St Patricks Anglican Church in Fortitude Valley. The idea came from a similar venue Ted was involved with in East London in the late 1950s. On his return to Brisbane, Ted was appointed Chaplain to the Archbishop as well as Diocesan Youth Chaplain which gave him oversight of all the youth organisations in the Diocese of Brisbane. Club 64 was set up and run by young members of the Church and attracted regular crowds of five hundred or more.

French, Pam	Year of Birth: 1941	Category: Promoter
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Pam is a sister to Carol Shepherd. She lived most of her teenage years in New Farm. She had four sisters, her father was a teacher and her mother had a business. Dancing was a big part of her life and rock 'n' roll became an important focus of her leisure time.

Gagen, Brian	Year of Birth: 1942	Category: Musician
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Brian has lived in Brisbane for most of his life and because his family was musical, he started learning the saxophone when he was about six years old. Both he and his brother played music at home, at school and in bands. Brian's first band, the Rhythm Rockers started playing in the Osborne Hotel in Sandgate when he was between fifteen and sixteen years old. As a saxophone player, he was invited to try out for the Hucklebucks and spent a couple of years with that band prior to joining the break away group that formed the Planets. He had a number of enjoyable years with the Planets prior to their demise.

Gray, John	Year of Birth: 1939	Category: Musician
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John was born in Gympie and spent much of his youth on cattle properties in the Mackay district. On coming to Brisbane he entered and won a talent quest singing Del Shannon's *Runaway* resulting in a number of invitations to join bands. In 1961 he formed Johnny Gray and the G-Men, a name that remained for some years even as band members changed. When that band finished, John began a solo career until in 1966, the Flamingos, one of the more successful bands to come out of Brisbane at the time, was formed. John has remained in the music industry as an entertainer to this day.

Halliwell, Bob	Year of Birth: 1941	Category: Musician
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Bob had been singing around Brisbane for a short while when he formed Bobby Wild and the Raiders. The band was relatively successful, working regularly at the Nundah Memorial Hall. His next band was formed by adding a couple of saxophones to the line-up (to compete with the Planets and changing the name to the Dominoes (mark 2). As well as a musician, Bob was a projectionist and managed to juggle his 'day' job requirements with his music commitments. For some time he was assistant manager at TCs sound lounge, which gave him access to a number of well-known artists.

James, Johnny	Year of Birth: 1928	Category: DJ
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John was born in northern New South Wales and began his radio career as a control room operator at 2LM in Lismore where he went on to

become the breakfast announcer. He came to 4BH in 1949 to do the breakfast show and in the mid 1950s went across to 4BC to do the breakfast show there until his retirement in 1971. As well as radio, John was doing regular DJ sessions around Brisbane, including at Cloudland and secured the compere's job for the first Brisbane rock 'n' roll TV show called the Coca Cola Hi Fi Club on Channel 9.

Kerwin, Doug	Year of Birth: 1941	Category: Dancer
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Married to Jan, Doug was educated to scholarship and began training as an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic. He began going to dances in his mid teens and remembers going to Cannon Hill when the Blue Jeans were playing. He also remembers the O'Connor Boathouse that was run by Bill Gates and travelling very quickly in a Vauxhal Wyvern between O'Connor Boathouse and Cloudland in search of girls and dancing.

Kerwin, Jan	Year of Birth: 1940	Category: Dancer
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Married to Doug, Jan lived a Carina and had a group of about eight friends with whom she used to go to dances. Tuesday night was Cloudland night and while she started the night in traditional dancing, she would always end up jiving in the roped off area. There was a danger involved in because she always wore her high heeled shoes, stockings, rope petticoats and a wide belt

Lendich, Vance	Year of Birth: 1941	Category: Musician
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Vance's first job with a band happened with the Red Caps in 1958, an experience that was enough to encourage him to wait a little longer

before he started into the music industry. In 1960, he tried out unsuccessfully with the Tremors at Palm Beach Hotel. The Trojans must have been more his cup of tea because he joined them for a successful eighteen month stint. Vance went to Sydney for six months and worked with Paul Wayne and the Embers. This band came to Brisbane to work with Nat Kipner at Channel 7 for a time and when they returned to Sydney, Vance stayed in Brisbane and accepted an invitation to play bass with the Planets. He stayed with the Planets until they finished in 1965.

Luck, Les	Year of Birth: 1936	Category: Dancer
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Born in New South Wales, Les started dancing when quick steps, prides of erin, gypsy taps and la bambas were in vogue. He lived in Sydney and met American soldiers when his father brought them home on a Sunday afternoon. For Les, jive is about set moves and set steps while rock 'n' roll is about how you feel.

Macando, Angelo	Year of Birth: 1937	Category: Dancer
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Born in Innisfail of Italian parentage, Angelo moved to Brisbane before the war to a family owned café in Spring Hill. During the war his father was put in an internment camp and the children were sent to orphanages. His three sisters went to Nazareth House in Wynnum while Angelo and his brother went to Nudgee orphanage for the period of the war. After the war his father was released and the family resumed life at New Farm. One of Angelo's sisters started going to Busteads in the Valley and she

taught him how to jive. Friday night soon became Busteeds' night for Angelo and Shirley Cronau was one of the girls he used to ask to dance. Many people would have classed Angelo as a bodge, primarily because of his dress.

MacDonnell, Dooley	Year of Birth: 1924	Category: Musician
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Dooley was born in Toowoomba and went to East State School. It was there that he started playing the drums each morning for the rest of the students to march into school. During the war he learned to play ukulele and graduated to rhythm guitar and steel guitar. He was transferred to Chinchilla with his railway job and started playing drums in a small dance band. He started making his own electric steel guitars guitars using pickups made from telephone coils. After winning Australia's Amateur Hour in 1957, Dooley organised with Allan Reed to bring the Hucklebucks out to the Warra hall, an arrangement that proved to be very successful. He later applied for a transfer to Brisbane and began playing in the Polynesian Room in the Travelodge for almost thirteen years.

McCourt, Aileen	Year of Birth: 1931	Category: Dancer
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Aileen is married to John and was born in Hughenden in North Queensland. During the war, her family was moved to South Australia for safety reasons and it was there that she learned how to dance the jitterbug from American soldiers. She came to Brisbane in 1947 and met John in 1952. She first heard rock 'n' roll when she and John were teaching jive to people in the Mt Gravatt area. Most of the early records

were obtained from sailors on ships that used to come to Brisbane. This started a life long interest in dancing to rock 'n' roll. The dance club that they ran began in their home and then moved to a hall in Mt Gravatt. It was held on a Monday night and ran until late 1957.

McCourt, John	Year of Birth: 1929	Category: Dancer
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John was born in Northern Ireland and was taught to jitterbug by the American soldiers who moved to the area during the war. He came to Australia in 1950 and married Aileen some time after 1952. Dancing was important in their lives and they depended on sailors from American ships to keep them up to date with what was happening in the new music field. When ships were in, the McCourts used to print out small advertisements for their dances and place them strategically on Hamilton wharf. Most Monday nights in the mid 1950s saw the McCourts at the Memorial Hall in MrGravatt teaching the local young people to jive. Parents would often take their children to the dance and the McCourts would make sure they arrived home safely.

McQuade, Betty	Year of Birth: 1941	Category: Musician
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Betty was born in Paisley, Scotland and came to Australia as a migrant in 1948. As a child she was taught dancing but a bicycle accident that resulted in a broken femur put an end to any future she may have had in dancing. Betty began singing as the result of a dare. She attended one of Jim Burke's Jazz Concerts in the City Hall during 1956 and was dared by her friends to take part in the talent quest. Betty entered and

eventually won the talent quest and was invited to sing with Jim Burke's band. She began also to sing with local rock 'n' roll bands with such success that she moved Melbourne when she was eighteen. In 1962 she had a minor hit with a song called *Midnight Bus* and spent many years in the entertainment industry doing live and television work.

Neal, Steve	Year of Birth: 1939	Category: Musician
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Steve spent most of his rock 'n' roll career as piano player in the Planets. He did not join the Planets from the very beginning but he joined them shortly after they formed, soon enough to remember Rob Tonge playing guitar. Steve stayed with the Planets for most of their life and was closely involved with the setting up and running of Birdland.

Preston, Noel	Year of Birth: 1941	Category: Management
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In the mid 1950s, Noel's father, the Rev Arthur Preston was Superintendent minister at West End Methodist Mission. Noel was part of a group from that church, overseen by his father, who set up Teenage Cabarets, rock 'n' roll dances that were aimed at attracting young people into church activities. This was quite a radical step, given that many Methodists of the time would have been anti-dancing. The operation proved to be very successful and was adopted by a number of churches around Australia.

Reed, Allan	Year of Birth: 1926	Category: Musician
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Allan was one of the initiators of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane. He was born in Beerburum and moved to Kelvin Grove in Brisbane with his family soon

after his birth. He had an interest in guitar playing, especially in country music, for much of his life. The coming of rock 'n' roll to Brisbane saw Allan experienced enough in the entertainment field to be amongst the first to put a rock 'n' roll band together. He arranged enough equipment and people to perform rock 'n' roll music live at the McCourts Monday night dances at the Memorial Hall Mt Gravatt starting in mid 1957. He went on to form the Hucklebucks, one of Brisbane's more successful and long lasting bands. With the coming of the Planets in 1959, Allan's new band featured Huck Berry front lining the Hucklebucks.

Reed, Kim	Year of Birth: 1947	Category: Dancer
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Married to Allan, Kim was born in Brisbane and lived most of her younger years in Cooparoo. Because her mother was quite a religious person, her upbringing was relatively strict to the point that her mother would turn off the TV when the Coca Cola Hi Fi Club was on. For her mother and a lot of other mothers, bodgies and widgies were a worry as far as their daughters were concerned. Kim was able to change her mother's mind about rock 'n' roll by taking her to the Elvis movie *Blue Hawaii*.

Richards, Rob	Year of Birth: 1940	Category: Musician
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Rob lived his formative years in Brisbane and went to Ashgrove primary school and Brisbane Grammar School. As a drummer, Rob played in his first band while he was at high school. He began work at the Department of Agriculture but once his music activities became noticed, he had to quit that job. Rob was one of the instigators of the Planets and played in

several bands, including the Hucklebucks, prior to the development of the Planets. Rob stayed with the Planets for the life of the band with the high point being the running of their own venue, Birdland. The Planets, as a band was run as a business and employed a business manager. For most of the time he was with the Planets, Rob did not have a regular day job but ran other entertainment business ventures.

Rolfe, Nick	Year of Birth: 1944	Category: Musician
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Nick started playing music when he was six years old and joined his brother's band when he was nine years old. He stayed there until he was fifteen but started his own rock 'n' roll band when he was twelve. The *Rhythm Rockers* lasted for a number of years until 1959. By 1961, they were resident at thirteen YCW dances in Brisbane. All this happened when he was still at school, Commercial High School in George Street, 50 guys and 950 girls. In 1959, the band became called the Clefs and stayed with that name and most of its members until 1981.

Shepherd, Carol	Year of Birth: 1937	Category: Dancer
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Carol is a sister to Pam French and was born in Kelvin Grove. She started going to dances when she was about 15 at a time when an area was roped off in most halls for the jivers. She used to go to Cloudland, Riverside Ballroom, and Jack Busteed's. Records were played at Jack Busteed's, jive was taught and bodgies and widgies very much part of the scene.

Tonge, Rob	Year of Birth: 1938	Category: Musician
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Rob was born in Toowoomba, moved to New South Wales and then back to Brisbane for his years eleven and twelve. He went to Church of England Grammar School in Sydney, an experience he did not enjoy. His mother had an interest in music so she bought him a guitar and he taught himself until he came to Brisbane and got some lessons from Rick Farbach. Prior to joining the Planets, Rob purchased a Levin guitar from Kings music store and a twenty-five watt amplifier. He used that equipment through his time with the Planets, including a job at Festival Hall. Rob only stayed with the Planets for about eighteen months because all the time he was with them, he was working towards being accepted as a commercial airlines pilot.

Troughton, Bev	Year of Birth: 1939	Category: Wife
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Bev married the late Gerry Troughton in 1961 when he was playing guitar with the Dominoes. She met Gerry on a blind date to the movies and it was 'love at first site'.

Vichary, Lester	Year of Birth:	Category: Musician
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Lester has been involved in the rock music industry since the very early days and a guitarist and an employee of Ron Cleghorn at Nundah Music Centre.

Vize, Gary	Year of Birth: 1942	Category: Musician
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Gary was born in Rockhampton and moved to Brisbane when he was fifteen. Rock 'n' roll dances were just starting then. He started to learn

guitar from a teacher at the Hawaiian Club at Wooloongabba and remembers being told about Chuck Supplee by this teacher. The first band Gary was in was Peter James and the J-Men and they secured a regular job at the Teenage Cabaret at the West End Methodist Mission. Peter James left to form a duo with Billy Thorpe and the band needed new people. Vance Lendich joined as bass player as did Vance's girlfriend Sandy Ainsworth, her brother Mel Ainsworth and her best friend Patty Kerry. The band became known as Ken Graham and the Trojans. In the early 1960s, Gary had to give up playing because he had an accident which damaged his had and arm.

Wallace, Des	Year of Birth: 1931	Category: Hairdresser
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Des was born in Brisbane and spent most of his working life as a hairdresser employed by Brisbane's best-known hairdresser, Col Naylor. Even though Des bought a bass guitar and amplifier, he never became involved in playing music but rather in the management side, in particular as a bouncer. Des has a very good understanding of the running of Birdland, having been involved with the refurbishment of the building as well as the running of the dances.

Worsely, Mrs	Year of Birth: 1919	Category: Mother
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Mrs Worsley came to Australia with her husband and six children in 1958 and settled in Brisbane. Music runs in the family. Both Mrs Worsley and her sister played the piano and her parents and grand parents sang.

Both Mrs Worsley and her husband supported Tony in his music career and often went to dances and shows that he was performing at.

Worsley, Tony	Year of Birth: 1942	Category: Musician
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Tony came to Australia with his family in 1958 and settled in Brisbane. He started singing in England and continued his interest in Brisbane and the Gold Coast. After some success in talent quests, he was asked to go to Melbourne by Ivan Dayman. He became the singer with The Blue Jays and recorded a number of songs that were successful nationally. Dayman bought the band back up to Brisbane and Tony continued his successful career from Brisbane.

Wright, Darryl	Year of Birth: 1943	Category: Musician
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Darryl was born in Charleville and came to Brisbane after his father passed away. He went to school at various Brisbane primary schools, began playing drums while at school and became interested in rock 'n' roll when he heard *Rock Around the Clock* in the movie *Blackboard Jungle*. At about ten years old he started learning the drums from Harry Lebler and when he was fifteen, he started playing in a band called the Tornadoes, a group that did not last all that long. Bobby Wilde and the Raiders was his next band and they began working regularly with the Saxons on Friday nights at the Nundah Memorial hall for a promoter by the name of Gil Hill. While the venue was a success, only one band was required and so some members of the Raiders and some of the Saxons

joined together to form the Dominoes (mark 2) in about 1962. This version of the Dominoes lasted until 1967 and was reformed in 1992.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Some of The Characters**

**John Pickering**

During a conversation in the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane in May 2000, John Pickering discussed his love for the music he was learning to play and sing in those early days, as well as the excitement of rock 'n' roll at this time. He also explained the respect he had for Chuck Supplice as a musician and an innovator. In a non-arrogant way, John understood that he was good at what he did and expressed some regret that he was never in a position to take his music career further than the South East corner of Queensland. His day job and family prevented this. While working as a musician, he worked four and five nights a week as well as holding down his day job with an auctioneering firm.

John especially commented on his ability to learn and remember a song, words and all, in a very short time. Often, only one or two hearings were needed for him to know a song, a skill that served him well over the years. He was particularly proud of the fact that he had worked with Buddy Holly a short time before Holly was killed in a plane crash near Clear Lake, Iowa in February 1959<sup>1</sup>. John remembered Holly as a very good stage performer and a very amiable person.

John was a very early starter in Brisbane rock 'n' roll and came from one of Brisbane's most eastern suburbs, Wynnum. His first contacts with rock 'n' roll were probably in 1957 through Chuck Supplice who also came from the same

suburb. It was not long however before he was encouraged to join Allan Reed in his band that was to be called the Hucklebucks. John stayed with the Hucklebucks until the Planets were formed and was one of the founding members of that band, staying with them until their demise.

Unfortunately for all, John passed away about three weeks after my initial conversation with him. He had become a 'hopeless alcoholic' in spite of the fact that he very seldom used alcoholic drinks when working in the early days of rock 'n' roll. We had planned to meet when he regained his health so that he could record his memories, especially of this early period. He indicated to me and to others that he was very keen to do this. It was not to be, however, and John died at a relatively young age, a victim, at least in part, of the lifestyle that was part and parcel of the early music industry.

### **Rock 'n' Roll George**

One of the real characters of Brisbane's rock 'n' roll was Rock 'n' Roll George and even though he was still living in West End, he was not prepared to make himself available to record his memories of the days of his fame, when he was able to drive his FJ Holden up and down Queen St and attend rock 'n' roll dances in the suburbs. According to Shirley Cronau, "everyone knew rock 'n' roll George. Even if they didn't know him personally, everyone used to say hello to him." He was a little older than most of the young people, probably by ten

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<sup>1</sup> Buddy Holly performed at Cloudland in a Lee Gordon Big Show with Paul Anka and Jerry Lee Lewis on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1958 (BT 03/02/58, p. 25).

years or so and generally did not go into the dances. Angelo Macaudo suggested that George:

*... made his reputation by having the FJ Holden and dressing a little more outrageously than what everybody else did. He would just drive up and down Queens St all the time or around the inner suburbs and everybody just got to know him. I think he was the sort of person that everybody knew but you really didn't know him personally. There may have been people who knew him personally, there would have to have been in the Greek community over at West End. But basically he was just one of the guys who was around all of the time and everybody knew him and saw him about and stuff like that ... He was in the era when we were starting to wear black things. Things like black stovepipe pants. At this particular time the big knees disappeared and then we were getting into what they called stovepipe. They were really narrow legs and they were black and you had either a white T shirt or a shirt that had white and black in it and those sort of colours. (Angelo Macaudo)*

Bob Halliwell remembers George from the days when the bodgies and widgies used to congregate on the T&G corner in Queen Street. George was a “real character” who just stood there and talked to everybody. In spite of the fact that “he never did anything wrong, he often used to get harassed by the police.” At one time he was taken the Police Station where:

*... he broke down and cried and that broke everybody's heart that this big fellow that we all knew, Rock 'n' Roll George, they got him to tears. That was terrible. That's the only thing I can remember, they must have harassed him somehow. (Bob Halliwell).*

Alan Campbell remembers George as a nice guy that everybody liked.

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*He's an old Rock 'n' Roll George now isn't he? This is back in the late 50s and early 60s. Dulcie Day ran all these dances and Rock 'n' Roll George was a young guy in a cream FJ Holden and he used to drive up and down Queen St, in those days you could drive up and down Queen St, all night long. The girls would adore him, of course, with an FJ Holden and he used to pick up girls and take 'em up and take 'em down and do other things with girls too, cause he was a girl's man, you know. I won't say anything more about that. Anyway, he's still around today and his car's still around today. I don't where to find it. But he's still around and he's still got the same car as far as I know. But he was a legend in those days.*

George used to attend dances regularly and was a good dresser.

*He used to come to Dulcie Day's dances and all that. Everybody used to like Rock 'n' Roll George, he was a nice guy. I only met him a few times because I was working and he was part of the audience isn't he. I don't have a photo of him unfortunately ... He was attired very good. He had a lovely car. Imagine it in the late 50s with an FJ Holden. Its like driving a Mercedes or something like that. Driving up and down Queen St with a Mercedes. The girls used to like him. (Alan Campbell).*

The McCourts had very different experiences with Rock 'n' Roll George. From their experience, he never came inside the dances but sat outside, "he was a letch, an old letch" (John McCourt).

*He had a very bad reputation with his own people, the Greek community and Mrs Trovas used to say to her daughters "If you're going to a dance and Rock 'n' Roll George is there, you do not go in, you come home. We don't want you to get involved." And yet all he did was sit outside of the dance ... But our girls got their own back on him. He used to drive an*

*old VW, a beat up old car of his own, and he turned up at our hall one night with his mother's car. It was a nice Holden ... they never came in. And he was sitting out there and one of the girls had been given as a Christmas gift a great big box of talcum powder. I think it was Daphne and she said lets go and give Rock 'n' Roll George a present. I thought they were gonna give him the talcum powder. They gave him the talcum powder all right, through the car window. It was like a snowstorm ... There was another one called Mulga Merve. The trouble with him was he was offensive because he was always drunk. Rock 'n' roll George was not a drinker. (Aileen McCourt).*

### **A Day in the Life**

*Music's been good to us one way, its been pretty cruel the other way.*  
(Tom Day)

There was a Day in the life of most of Brisbane's early rock 'n' rollers. Few would have been able to escape the influence of Tom and Dulcie Day and their family, so wide was their involvement in the music scene during Brisbane's formative rock 'n' roll years. From their home in Holland Park, Dulcie's unbounding energy and Tom's unwavering support for her exploits radiated to the suburban halls of the growing city, drawing into their expanding web of influence almost anyone who had an interest in rock 'n' roll in Brisbane in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Dulcie was born Dulcie Burton in Mt Gravatt in 1914. She was six months older than Tom. As a child, her family moved to South Brisbane where her father had a dancing studio. Dulcie had two brothers and the children of the Burton family were educated at West End State School prior to their moving to

Stones Corner from where they attended Coorparoo State School. Even as a young child she was a dancer and by 14, Dulcie taught ballroom dancing with her father in a studio in Grey St, South Brisbane. Her father, as well as being a dancing teacher, at the time managed Brisbane's Trocadero Ballroom that was situated in Melbourne St near the South Brisbane railway station.

Tom was about twenty-one when he met Dulcie, their meeting a result of a mutual interest in ballroom dancing.

*I met Dulce at the Trocadero and in those days, you'd see these people, there were hundreds of people used to go there, Wednesday night was the dance night, that was ballroom, Friday night was old time, Saturday night, that was the good night, 50/50, old time and jazz. So you could be going there for months on end and you'd meet these people or women and you'd dance with them and there was nothing to it. Then all of a sudden, for some reason or other, we used to travel all the way to Newmarket from Camp Hill by tram just to go to a dance, and this particular night, my friend invited Dulce to go to Newmarket. He said "Pick you up at Adelaide St." That was where you changed trams, off the Camp Hill tram onto the Newmarket tram and away you'd go. And so Dulce went to the Newmarket and that's when we sort of got attached. From there on away we went and we kept company for quite a long time. (Tom Day)*

It is difficult to say with any confidence who of the pair was most difficult to trap marriage wise, because they courted for around six years before tying the proverbial knot in 1942. While ballroom dancing was their consuming passion for the 1940s and well into the 1950s, rock 'n' roll was to drastically transform life for the Day family during the first half of the 1950s. In mid 1957, a

young husband and wife team were running dances in a small hall at Mt Gravatt at which "jiving" was done. Dulcie, had the urge to go and see what this new "jive" thing was about and attempted to induce Tom to join her in the expedition. Tom thought he knew better and declined the invitation. Dulcie was not to be deterred by a small thing such as a refusal and so she asked their oldest son, 13-year-old Tom (jnr) to accompany her for the evening's entertainment.

John and Aileen McCourt who had by this time hired a band to provide some of the music ran the dances. The musicians on stage that evening included Allan Reed, John Reid and John Pickering, who collectively went on to become the Hucklebucks. So excited was Dulcie by the music and its possibilities that her life, and that of her family, was changed forever.

*...what she did from there on, she walked up to them and said, "Listen mister, do you play outsiders?" "Oh yes we do." "Do you play rock 'n' roll?" "Yes." So they said and they did their best. But anyway, what she did, that week she went and booked a hall. (Tom Day)*

Dulcie booked the band and during the following week made preparations for her first rock 'n' roll dance. She chose the Judean Hall in Deshon St situated between the inner suburbs of Woolloongabba, East Brisbane and Buranda and set her advertising in motion. According to Tom, running a dance in Brisbane in those days was not just a matter of advertising a band and a venue. Protocol required that the dance be run in aid of some charity. The charity Dulcie chose was the appeal for the soon to be erected display shelter at Eagle Farm for the Kingsford Smith aircraft.

*...so she rang up the Telegraph and said "I'm gonna run dances partly in aid of the Kingsford Smith appeal." And that started her off full bore. She took this band, Alan Reed, and we started in Deshon St. There was no other dances like this. (Tom Day).*

The dances were a great success. According to Tom, patrons came from all over Brisbane and the general public was amazed, among other things, never having seen anything like it before. So successful was the concept that it wasn't long before a couple of bands were being promoted by Dulcie and the number of dances being run each week increased dramatically. Tom remembers Dulcie going from one hall to another in various parts of Brisbane until they were going out four or five nights per week to dances she was promoting. Venues such as the South Brisbane Library Hall, the Windsor School of Arts, the Riverside Ballroom and the pavilion at the Ipswich Showgrounds were but a few of Dulcie's conquests. As one venue petered out, she would move on to the next unperturbed.

Some of these venues would attract only a moderate crowd of between one and two hundred while others were much larger. The Railway Institute dances, which were held on a Friday night and run by Dulcie for a long time, used to attract up to twelve hundred patrons. The new Festival Hall, built as a replacement for the old Stadium, proved to be an ideal venue for large promotions. Dulcie was the first to run such a function in that hall which, at that time, was managed by Mr Bert Potts.

*He was a hungry old bugger... He was the manager. He would sit on the sidelines and you would have to pay him for doing nothing. (Tom Day)*

Festival Hall was so successful for large dances that many of Dulcie's functions attracted up to 2000 patrons. For these dances, she often hired Sydney bands that, while they frequently drew good crowds, were more trouble than they were worth because they were often hard to get on with. Varsity 5 for instance:

*She got them up from Sydney then they wanted 5 star hotel accommodation and all that bullshit. "Pack your bags and go back, you're not getting it" she said. (Tom Day)*

Crowds at Dulcie's dances were generally well behaved, mainly because, according to Tom, they were so engrossed in dancing rock 'n' roll. Dulcie always made sure she had police present as backup and at times, when she thought that things may be a little difficult, she would hire up to four officers. These police were usually dressed in uniform and were paid for by Dulcie at a rate agreed to with the police department.

Unseemly behaviour often focussed on the hiding of alcohol somewhere around the precincts of the building or was the result of drinking alcohol either on or off the premises during the evening. There were none of the other drugs now generally associated with the entertainment industry, so the policing factor of the dances was relatively simple. A strict dress code was enforced for entry into Dulcie's dances so all patrons had to be well dressed, no T shirts or

sandals, and their hair, especially for the males, was usually well trimmed and tidy.

*Well the girls had little flared skirts, when they used to swing around the skirt would flare out and underneath the skirt was a stiffening type of thing. It was specially made for the rock 'n' roll things ... In that era the girls were well dressed and the men, their hair was always well groomed, not long and scraggy, never wore T shirts, always wore shirts. (Tom Day)*

Dulcie's was well known for the care she took of her young patrons and did her best to ensure that the environment was safe for everybody. Parents understood this and many a mother would contact Dulcie as a form of reassurance that her daughter would be safe.

*The mothers used to ring Dulce up and thank her. She'd say "Look I'm sending my daughter to your dance, would you keep an eye on her Dulce?" She was like a hen with chickens Dulce, everybody knew her and respected her. (Tom Day)*

One aspect of making the environment safe for the patrons was being firm and even strict with them if needs be. And Dulcie knew how to be that when the situation warranted it. According to Tom, these ventures could not and would not continue if they were not financially viable. People sometimes seemed to forget that Dulcie had to make her exploits at least pay their way. Tom remembers a time at the South Brisbane Library Hall when an up and coming young band called the Red Caps visited the dance, expecting to be allowed free entry.

*...along came with this band called The Red Caps and he thought he was gonna march in. She said, "Listen son, you pay your way like everybody else." He said, "We're the Red Caps." She said, "I don't care if you're the Boot Caps, you pay your way." (Tom Day)*

The drummer in that band, and the person who probably replied "We're the Red Caps" was Alan Campbell who went on to be employed many times in various bands by Dulcie and played in a band with Tom (jnr).

Dulcie was always keen to promote up and coming talent and many a young band approached Dulcie for a start to their musical career.

*All right, bring your band along, set em up on stage and I'll give you a spot. If you're any good you'll get a job and that's the way it was with her. She was wonderful when it comes to giving young people a kick along. (Tom Day).*

Since so much time was spent on promoting these dances, it was reasonable to expect that the children of Tom and Dulcie would become involved in the music industry in some way or other. Tom played his part in making sure that this could happen. He felt that it was important for his children to be taught music by a reputable teacher and that is what happened.

All this occurred towards the very end of the 50s at a time when rock 'n' roll bands were springing up everywhere. And while there seemed to be no shortage of guitar players, most of the newer bands were unable to include a bass guitar player in their line up because of a shortage of the instrument. No one had imported a bass guitar into Brisbane up to this time and Tom (snr) saw

an opening that needed to be filled. While many of the early international bands had included a double bass in their line up, the relatively recent development of the bass guitar by Leo Fender in California made the double bass redundant almost overnight as far as rock 'n' roll goes. The double bass was not unheard of in Brisbane rock 'n' roll bands though.

Tom decided that he should try to build a bass guitar, and while most people associated with the early days of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane are aware of Tom's building one bass guitar, he actually built two. The first was made on trial for Derek Harris.

*That was the first bass guitar I made on trial for Derek Harris ...It was a heavy bugger. It was a solid bloody thing. (Tom Day)*

This guitar is now owned by Alan Campbell and is still in working order. Alan remembers its history a little differently.

*Then when the bass guitars came in, in 1960 or 61, Jerry's father, Tony [Troughton] and Derek made this first bass guitar, which is the one we see down there. (Alan Campbell)*

*Like Tommy Day actually had one made and that's the one that Alan Campbell's got. He's got that old bass with the big thick neck that was the one that Tommy Day used to play ... That would have been easily 1959 or 1960. (Lester Vichary)*

The bass guitar that Tom Day (jnr) used to play was the second one made and constructed somewhat differently from the first - Tom had learned from his experience with the first.

*Its made of one piece of maple wood as a stem-post. It goes right through but packed around it was balsa wood and I made the shape of the guitar in balsa wood and I covered it with maple ply and the sides with veneer. You could pick it up like that it was so light. The one I made for Derek was a solid bloody thing. It was a bummer ... But I never let the cat out of the bag. They said Gerry Troughton made it but he didn't, I made it for Derek Harris. (Tom Day)*

The second bass guitar is in the possession of the Queensland Museum, having been donated by Tom.

Tom (jnr) practised his music and with the advent of the bass guitar, moved into rock 'n' roll. At this time, Claude Carnell, who ran the Playroom at Currumbin, also used to promote the Planets at the RSL hall at Coolangatta each Christmas. Whilst talking one day as Christmas approached, Tom and Dulcie mentioned to Claude that their son was in the music business as a bass player and had his own rock 'n' roll band. At the time he was using the homemade bass guitar and a large bass amplifier made by Tony Troughton. Fortunately Tom (snr) had a Plymouth car that was large enough to fit both in the boot and Tom was encouraged to set up his rig to show Claude. Tom and Dulcie were attempting to get Claude to give Tom (jnr) and his band a spot at his venue but other things were on Claude's mind.

*"Why worry about the spot son" said Claude, "you start in 2 weeks in the Playroom." (Tom Day)*

Tommy didn't think it was possible, but his father thought it was important to give it a go, so he devised a plan to prepare him in those two weeks. Tom used the Victor Sivlestor records that Dulcie had played for dancing lessons and every couple of nights, he would introduce Tommy to a different style of music, be it a waltz, a quickstep or a foxtrot.

*So he got the beat and by the end of the 2 weeks was up he had blisters on his fingers. This poor kid, I often think of what he did. But anyway we went down to Claude and Claude said "Alright son" he always called him son, "Set you gear up, tune in," he didn't know how to, but anyhow within a couple of weeks, he was only supposed to take the place of his own slap bass player, this professional man, he was there for 2 years and he absolutely idolized Tom. Tom used to play for all the top artists in the world. They used to come to Claude Carnell's Playroom, he was known for it, and he'd do the background behind the curtain. The Maori Troubadors used to come and play there and they'd say, "Where's the king?" They christened him the king. So that was that guitar. That one is in the museum now. I thought why give it to anybody, its there for the rock 'n' roll era. (Tom Day)*

Tom's home made bass guitar served him well, but he was bound to want to move to a professional model.

*... Lonnie Lee had come to town and he said "Righto Tom, we're going to Warwick, we're going to Toowoomba" so he took Tom for the backing of his band. Johnny O'Keefe went to America and came back with one of the first bass guitars from Fender. What did Lonnie Lee do, he borrowed*

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*it off Johnny for Tom to play because he didn't like what I made. He used to call it the axe and so smart Dulcie rings up Johnny, "Hey John." "Yes Dulcie what's your trouble?" "You've got a bass guitar up here. Do you want to sell it?" "Oh I suppose so Dulcie." "Whats it worth? I'll give you £100." "Alright then, send the money down." So she sent the money down and I had the letter and it was a beautiful letter from Johnny. He had an etching of himself singing with the microphone on all the pages of the letter. It was a good letter but its gone. It'd be worth money today. But you don't know do you. So that's how Tom came to have a Fender. From there on he never used his old bass again. It was always in working order.* (Tom Day)

Peter, the second son in the Day family showed an interest in music and so his father suggested that he would build him a steel guitar. Peter was sent to lessons with the steel guitar.

*... I said to Peter "You can't learn it, you gotta go to a teacher. Lets have 6 months at the teacher and then you can do your own thing." "All right dad." He'd come home from work, I'd say never mind about tea, have your bath after and I'd take him out to Creek Road to this chap, get his lesson, come home, have a bath, have his tea and then he'd practise.*

(Tom Day)

Peter practised hard and progressed well. Older brother Tom though had some strong ideas as to the direction he should take however. Peter had been learning to play directly from written music and brother Tom understood that the success in the modern music industry required playing without music.

*He'd have music and along would come Tom and take the music off him. "Can you play it now?" he'd say. "No I can't." "Well you gotta learn"*

*said Tom. "You gotta learn both Peter, you gotta learn the music and you gotta learn to do it without." He was hard on him but it paid off.*  
(Tom Day)

Peter didn't continue for too long on the steel guitar. He finished up a bass player and obtained his Fender amplifier and Fender bass guitar from the bass player of another band who was getting married.

*... this young chap was in the band, I forget his name, Johnny Gray and the G Men I think they called themselves, this young chap had a Fender amp and a Fender bass guitar and he said "Dulcie, do you know anybody who wants to buy it, I'm getting married next week and I want the money." "Alright I'll think about it" she said. We came home and said "Peter, would you like to play bass?" "Oh yes dad." "How much money you got?" "Come on get your self into gear." Out to this bloke we went and bought it. Caused a storm in the band cause we'd robbed em of a bass guitar and the bass guitar was the guts of the band. And Johnny Gray, I'll never forget it, said, "Peter'll never make a bass player as long as he's got so and so." I said "Oh". Peter finished up traveling all around Australia with the Avengers. (Tom Day)*

The Avengers were one of the few Queensland bands to win the Hoadley's Battle of the Bands, a national band competition held during the 1960s.

Darcy was the third son and played tenor and baritone sax. He was a gifted musician who seemed to be able to extract music out of anything he touched. While she was running Club 65 in Ipswich, Dulcie was able to purchase an alto sax from Eddie Thompson for a good price. It was duly presented to Darcy who was thrilled. Once again, Tom insisted that he take

lessons from a reputable teacher. Ernie Marsden, who worked from Drouyns at Stones Corner was the teacher of choice and Tom said to him, "Ernie, here's my son I want you to teach him." Within six months, Darcy was complaining, suggesting that rather than learning "all that classical stuff" he wanted to play rock 'n' roll. Tom suggested to Darcy that he combine the two, practice both what his teacher wanted and what he himself wanted to do. His advise was to no avail however and the sax ended up under the bed. Tom hated to see all this talent not being used so he did something he hadn't done before or hasn't done since.

*Now I never lied to my family ever in my life, but this is one time I lied. He used to thump away at the piano and then he'd pick up the guitar and he had this hoard of guys underneath the house all strumming and laughing and all playing bits of guitars and that and this is the only lie I ever told him, and I feel a little bit guilty in one way but I said "Darcy," he said "Yes Dad." I said, "look there's a young guy rang up wanting to know if there was a Day boy playing rock 'n' roll sax." "Did he? What's his name?" "Oh he said he was gonna ring back." Next thing I knew, that night it was out. I'd done it. I didn't tell him ever but that was the first lie I ever told. (Tom Day)*

Darcy took the alto down to Drouyns and traded it on a baritone sax. Older brother Tom approved saying "That's the thing" and what ever Tom said was gospel as far as the younger Days were concerned.

*I'll never forget him, he came down to the fire station one afternoon with this great box and I said, "What the hell you got there?" He pulls it out*

*on the bed and puts it all together and he played this baritone. I said, "What will you do with that?" He said "You'll see." (Tom Day)*

Darcy didn't go back to his teacher but practised the baritone hard and decided that there was a need for a tenor as well. Dulcie took him into Palings in town and purchased the tenor, the receipt for which Tom still has.

Tom (jnr) saw the possibilities for his talented brother and organised a lead guitarist, Ray Roberts, a bass player and a singer so a band could be formed, The Trinity. Much work occurred at the Days house both during the day and well into the night with rehearsals lasting about seven weeks. The group, included two saxes and went out to an audition at the Zillmere Hotel. They were offered a contract after only a couple of songs.

*They played all right and this guy came up and said, "Here, sign the dotted line." He put them on contract and the first job they lost their life. The drummer lost his life and Darcy lost his life too. It was that Whisky A Go Go fire. The bookings were so good for em, he was taking them to Manilla, I forget his name, he vanished after that and he was never the same bloke again. That was poor old Darcy. Music's been good to us one way, its been pretty cruel the other way.*

Given that most of the children were involved in music, the Day house was seldom quiet.

*One Saturday afternoon, there was a 14 piece jazz group run by my son Tom used to go all Saturday afternoon, those rehearsals ...Under the house. Upstairs in the lounge was Darcy's rock 'n' roll band practising. I'll never forget one Saturday, Darcy was trying to play Phoenix and all*

*of a sudden the big band struck up and played Phoenix. He said "I'm not playing that no more." They took the piano downstairs and its never returned to the lounge room. (Tom Day)*

For Tom, having his children involved in music was a benefit not only to them but also their friends.

*For one thing it kept the kids off the streets and they didn't get into bad company. And once they started to do this, their mates would look up to em and say "Gee I wish I could do that." (Tom Day)*

As Tom said, music was good to the Day family in some ways and pretty cruel in another. While it gave Tom and Dulcie great pleasure to see family involvement and success both in their own business ventures and those of their children in a field of endeavour they really enjoyed, it was during their period of involvement with music that they lost two of their children. Tom (jnr) died as a result of an accident while he was fishing from the rocks at Point lookout and Darcy died as a result of a fire deliberately lit at the Whisky au Go Go night club. Sadly, Darcy initially escaped from the burning building but went back in to retrieve his instruments. He never made it out.

*That puts a dint in your armour, I'll tell you. (Tom Day).*

## **Appendix 3**

### **Transcript Return**

7 Timothy Court  
Jones Hill  
GYMPIE 4570  
Phone/Fax 5482 8644

<<Date>>

<<Name>>  
<<Address1>>  
<<Address2>> <<pcode>>

Dear <<firstname>>

Thank you for the opportunity of being able to speak with you recently. It was certainly my privilege to spend time with you and gain a very valuable insight into the memories you have regarding rock 'n' roll in Brisbane during the 50s and 60s. I consider your memories to be a very important part of my research.

Enclosed is a transcript of our conversation. I wonder if you wouldn't mind reading it through and correcting any errors that I have made. These could include spelling mistakes (I have placed 3 asterisks beside names I was not sure of how to spell and would be pleased if you could write any changes in the margins). Additionally, I may have misinterpreted what you said. If you feel that what is written does not fully represent your memories please add or delete what ever you think needs to be changed.

I have included a stamped addressed envelope for you to return the corrected transcript.

Once again, thank you very much for your time and the memories. I look forward to meeting with you again in the not too distant future.

Regards

---

Geoff Walden

## **Appendix 4**

### **Participant Release Form**

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## A History of Rock 'n' Roll in Brisbane

Research Project

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give permission for the interview made with Geoff Walden on the \_\_\_\_\_ to be used in the "A History of Rock 'n' Roll in Brisbane" research project for the purposes of research and subsequent publication.

--oOo--

I give permission for my name to be used to identify the source of the interview.

I wish to remain anonymous.

I give permission for the original tape of the interview and the transcript to be deposited with an appropriate archives or library for the use of bona fide researchers.

Permission must be granted from the interviewee before material from the interview is used by other researchers.

Any other conditions.

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Interviewee's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 5**

### **Initial Invitation**

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## Rock 'n' Roll in Brisbane

### An invitation

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Have you ever:

- **attended** rock 'n' roll dances in Brisbane in the 50s and early 60s?
- attended any of **Dulcie Day's** dances?
- **jived** at **Cloudland**?
- been **thrown out** of any of these dances?
- **played** in a rock 'n' roll band in Brisbane in the 50s and or 60s?
- **promoted** rock 'n' roll dances in Brisbane in the 50s or early 60s?
- **driven** up and down Queen St in your FJ after a rock 'n' roll dance?
- attended an early rock 'n' roll concert in the **Stadium**?
- been at or near a rock 'n' roll **riot** in Brisbane?

---

Good morning

My name is Geoff Walden and I am a Ph D student at QUT (Queensland University of Technology). I am presently involved in some research for my thesis which is looking into the first 10 years of rock 'n' roll in Brisbane. My research will be presented in the form of an oral history, that is history as told by the people who were there and experienced it. I believe that it is important that this history be recorded now while it is still fresh in our memories (I'm a baby boomer too) and that it should be recorded from the perspective of ordinary people, not the authorities. Hence after I present my thesis, I hope to include the memories provided by Brisbane people in a book that I plan to work on with John Bell.

If you have a story to tell about this important period in Brisbane's history, I would like very much to make contact with you. Since some of my work will be presented on a CD ROM, I am also keen to view photos, movies and other memorabilia which you feel may add to this history. I plan to scan anything I can into a computer so it will not be necessary to take your valuable material away from your place.

I am presently talking with people and recording these conversations on tape. These tapes will be placed in archives so that people in the future interested in this era can get their information right from the horse's mouth.

If you feel you would like to include your memories or memorabilia in this project, please do not hesitate to contact me on 07 5482 8644. That is a Gympie number so I promise not to keep you too long on the phone.

Many Thanks

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